

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

*or* AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna  
and its Universal Message

**January 2018**

Vol. 123, No. 1

₹ 100.00

# THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON  
*Sri Ramakrishna*

In the presence of my Master I found out that man could be perfect, even in this body. Those lips never cursed anyone, never even criticized anyone. Those eyes were beyond the possibility of seeing evil, that mind had lost the power of thinking evil. He saw nothing but good. That tremendous purity, that tremendous renunciation is the one secret of spirituality. How can great spirituality come without that renunciation? Renunciation is the background of all religious thought wherever it be, and you will always find that as this idea of renunciation lessens, the more will the senses creep into the field of religion, and spirituality will decrease in the same ratio. He was a triumphant example, a living realisation of the complete conquest of lust and of desire for money. He was beyond all ideas of either. It is necessary in a time like this that a man should arise to demonstrate to the sceptics of the world that there yet breathes a man who does not care a straw for all the gold or all the fame that is in the universe. The other idea of his life was intense love for others. The first part of my Master's life was spent in acquiring spirituality, and the remaining years in distributing it. So men came in crowds to hear him, and he would talk twenty hours in the twenty-four, and that not for one day, but for months and months until at last the body broke down under the pressure of this tremendous strain. His intense love for mankind would not let him refuse to help even the humblest of the thousands who sought his aid. This



man from a remote village of Bengal, without education, by the sheer force of his own determination, realised the truth and gave it to others, leaving only a few young boys to keep it alive. Today the name of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa is known all over India to its millions of people. Nay, the power of that man has spread beyond India, and if there has ever been a word of truth, a word of spirituality, that I have spoken anywhere in the world, I owe it to my Master; only the mistakes are mine. This is the message of Sri Ramakrishna to the modern world: 'Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality; and the more this is developed in man, the more powerful is he for good. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realisation. Only those can understand who have felt. Only those who have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light.'

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2016), 4. 178-82



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Printed and Published by  
*Swami Vibhatmananda*

**PUBLICATION OFFICE**  
Advaita Ashrama  
5 Dehi Entally Road  
Kolkata • 700 014  
West Bengal, India  
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**INTERNET EDITION**  
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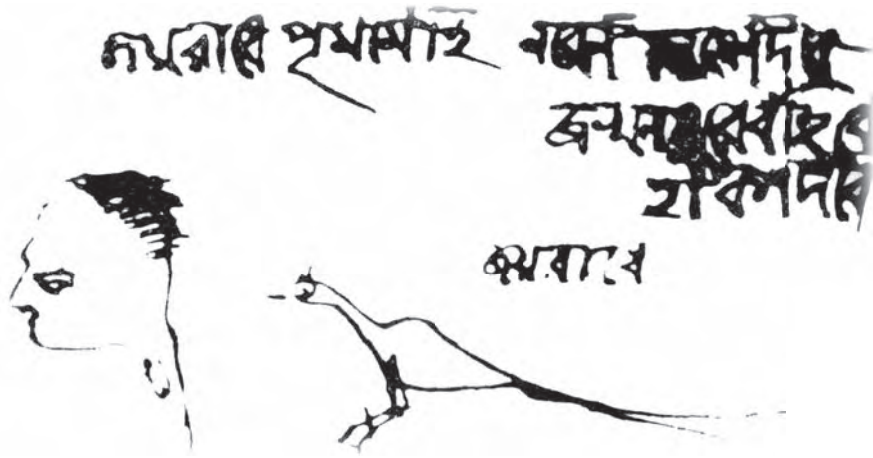
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## TO OUR READERS

**T**HE HISTORY OF RELIGION has various hues of practices, traditions, rituals, myths, and experiences. In Sri Ramakrishna's life, one finds a masterly synthesis of the entire history of religious experiences of humankind. A student of the life of Sri Ramakrishna is enamoured by the depth of religious understanding evinced in this life and seeks guidance to experience oneself even a miniscule iota of the wealth of experiences that Sri Ramakrishna had. It is to this end that the reader should take to the study of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. This issue of *Prabuddha Bharata* attempts to understand the message and the influence of this text.

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* as a text has deeper and deeper nuances that have been deftly layered by the recorder of the text, Mahendranath Gupta aka M. It is as though the text transports the reader to the closest possible proximity of Sri Ramakrishna and creates a rapturous setting that is no more limited to the written word. There is in the text, interspersed with scriptural knowledge, information about a cultural past that many of the present-day society are ignorant of, and those few who are aware, undergo severe identity crises thereby depriving them of the innocence and naiveté of the pristine past. Probably for the first time in the history of spiritual literature humankind has been gift-

ed with a narrative that reads less and performs more. The dance, song, and mirth coupled with the divine presence of Sri Ramakrishna coming out alive from every page of the text, makes reading a performative experience that has no parallels. In this issue we have taken a rather bold step towards the near impossible task of presenting all the facets of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

As in the previous years, this year too we are committed to bring to the readers original research work on the vast material on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda lying hidden in the various archives across the world.

We thank our subscribers and readers for having supported us for these 122 years. We invite them to send us letters or emails, giving their feedback, and also expressing their views on issues that find place in the pages of this journal. We thank the staff of the journal for ensuring a smooth ride. We are grateful to all the authors, researchers, reviewers, photographers, artists, publishers who have sent their books for review, proofreaders, copyeditors, advertisers, patrons, donors, web page designers, and well-wishers. Their support and encouragement has ensured that gems of wisdom and insights of depth have reached the minds of countless, month after month, year after year.



# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

**Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!**

## Maitrayaniya Upanishad

January 2018  
Vol. 123, No. 1

### मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

प्राकृतमन्नं त्रिगुणभेदपरिणामत्वान्महदाद्यं विशेषान्तं लिङ्गं । अनेनैव चतुर्दशविधस्य मार्गस्य व्याख्या भवति । सुखदुःखमोहसंज्ञं ह्यन्नभूतमिदं जगत् नहि बीजस्य स्वादुपरिग्रहोऽस्तीति यावन्न प्रसूतिः । तस्याप्येवं तिसृष्ववस्थास्वन्नत्वं भवति कौमारं यौवनं जरा परिणामत्वात् तदन्नत्वं । एवं प्रधानस्य व्यक्ततां गतस्योपलब्धिर्भवति तत्र बुद्ध्यादीनि स्वादुनि भवन्त्यध्यवसाय-सङ्कल्पाभिमाना इत्यथेन्द्रियार्थान् पञ्च स्वादुनि भवन्त्येवं सर्वाणीन्द्रियकर्माणि प्राणकर्माण्येवं व्यक्तमन्नमस्य निर्गुणो भोक्ता भोक्तृत्वाच्चैतन्यं प्रसिद्धं तस्य । यथाऽग्निर्वै देवानामन्नादः सोमोऽन्नमग्निरैवान्नमित्येवंवित् सोमसंज्ञोऽयं भूतात्माऽग्निसंज्ञोऽप्यव्यक्तमुखा इति वचनात्पुरुषो ह्यव्यक्तमुखेन त्रिगुणं भुङ्क्ते इति यो हैवं वेद सन्न्यासो योगो चात्मयाजी चेत्यथ यद्वन्न कश्चिच्छून्यागारे कामिन्यः प्रविष्टान् सन्न्यासी योगी चात्मयोगी चेति ।

॥६.१०॥

*Prakritam-annam triguna-bheda-parinamatvan-mahadadyam visheshantam lingam.  
Anenaiva chaturdasha-vidhasya margasya vyakhya bhavati. Sukha-duhkha-moha-samjnam  
hyanna-bhutamidam jagat nahi bijasya svadu-parigraho'stiti yavanna prasutih. Tasyapy-evam  
tisrishv-avasthasv-annatvam bhavati kaumaram yauvanam jara parinamatvat tadannatvam.  
Evam pradhanasya vyaktatam gatasyopalabdhir-bhavati tatra buddhyadini svaduni bhavanty-  
adhyavasaya-sankalpa-abhimana ity-athendriyarthan pancha svaduni bhavantyevam sarvani-  
indriyakarmani prana-karmanyevam vyaktamannam-asya nirguno bhokta bhoktritvach-  
chaitanyam prasiddham tasya. Yatha'gnirvai devanam-annadah somo'nnam-agninaiva-  
annamityevamvit somasamjno'yam bhutatma'gni-samjno'py-avyaktamukha iti vachanat-purusho  
hy-avyakta-mukhena trigunam bhunkta iti yo haivam veda sannnyaso yogo chatma-yaji chetyatha  
yadvanna kashchichbhunyagare kaminyah pravishtan sannnyasi yogi chatmayogi cheti. (6.10)*

All that begins with the intellect and ends with the elements, being a transformation of the distinction of nature with its three qualities is the sign that there must be a self. And by this, the fourteen-fold course is explained. This world is indeed the food, called pleasure, pain, and delusion. There is no apprehension of the taste of the seed-cause so long as there is no production of effect. And in its three conditions also it has the character of food, as childhood, youth, and old age. There is in them the character of food, on account of transformation. Thus as nature moves to the state of becoming manifest, there arises the perception of it. For the tasting of the effects of nature arise intellect and the like, determination, conception, and self-love. Then there are the five objects of sense, for the tasting of them. Thus arise all actions of organs and actions of senses. Thus the manifest is food and the unmanifest is food. The enjoyer of it is without qualities but from the fact of the enjoyer being an enjoyer it is evident that the enjoyer possesses consciousness. As fire, indeed, is the eater of food among the gods and Soma is the food, so one who knows this eats food by fire. The elemental self is called Soma. One who has the unmanifest as one's mouth is called Agni because of the saying: 'The person truly with the unmanifest as one's mouth enjoys the three qualities.' One who knows this is a renouncer, a contemplator, a performer of the self-sacrifice. Even as there is no one to touch sensual women, who have entered into an empty room, so one who does not touch objects of sense that enter into oneself is a renouncer, a contemplator, a performer of the self-sacrifice. (6.10)



## EDITORIAL

# Seeing the Profound in the Mundane: Studying The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

A TEXT THAT IS HANDED DOWN as the words spoken by a divine being or an incarnation of God is called gospel. Various faith-traditions and religions have various gospels that are adhered to with sincere devotion and sometimes, more often in recent times, with abject fundamentalism and fanaticism. In general, such gospel texts have the message of God, the almighty, sometimes interspersed with the message of the prophet or incarnation delivering the message.

What is a gospel? A religious studies scholar defines it thus:

A word of Anglo-Saxon origin, and meaning 'God's spell', i.e., word of God, or rather, according to others, 'good spell', i.e., good news. It is the rendering of the Greek *evangelion*, i.e., 'good message'. It denotes (1) 'the welcome intelligence of salvation to man as preached by our Lord and his followers. (2.) It was afterwards transitively applied to each of the four histories of our Lord's life, published by those who are therefore called 'Evangelists', writers of the history of the gospel (the *evangelion*). (3.) The term is often used to express collectively the gospel doctrines; and 'preaching the gospel' is often used to include not only the proclaiming of the good tidings, but the teaching of men how to avail themselves of the offer of salvation, the declaring of all the truths, precepts, promises, and threatenings of Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

The above definition is of course a Christian one as the word 'gospel' has strong Christian underpinnings, even today. The following is a more recent and more global definition of the word 'gospel': 'The message or teachings of a religious teacher ... something accepted or promoted as infallible ... truth or as a guiding principle or doctrine.'<sup>2</sup>

The reason why Mahendranath Gupta aka M. the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* chose the word 'gospel' is not clear. Though he named his original Bengali text as *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, he started an English translation, that he could not finish, and named it *Leaves from the Gospel of the Lord Sree Ramakrishna*, and it was published serially in *Brahmavadin* on 15 October 1897, 16 November 1897, 1 February 1898, and 16 May 1898. Here, the use of the words 'gospel' and 'lord' is notable. Swami Nikhilananda, the translator of the most popular and most commonly used edition originally published by the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, New York, retained the word 'gospel'. It could be that M. wanted to take advantage of the erstwhile Christian influence in India by echoing the salvific nature of the text. Probably, in a freer India of today, more leaning towards indigenous traditions, M. would have chosen a different word. M. could have chosen the word 'gospel' just to increase the traction of the book.



It is interesting to note that the other extant English translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* do not use the word 'gospel' in the title, and have kept the Bengali word *Kathamrita* in the title. Another translation, that also does not use the word 'gospel', is known to be inaccurate and lies as an unpublished doctoral dissertation, unavailable to the public.<sup>3</sup>

Very few gospels are just the message of the prophet or incarnation, or some such other spiritual personage, without any interpolations. It is because of these interpolations that the gospels of various religions or faith-traditions have come to be seen with tremendous suspicion and the demand to pass them through the microscopic lens of critical evaluation and analyses by scholars, often non-believers, arises. There is always this insecurity of having to lose to blind faith even when there is reason; notwithstanding that this very attitude of seeing some tradition to be a blind faith, could by itself be called a faith.

Interpolation is thus defined by a biblical scholar:

In its rigorous sense, an interpolation is an insertion in a text or document with the object of obtaining backing or authority for the interpolator's opinion or project. This is the ordinary dictionary sense of the group of words, 'interpolation, interpolate, interpolator'. This is also the meaning resigned to the word by legal usage, according to which an interpolation is an insertion within a will or deed, or a molding of its text to an end distinct from the original end and aim of the text itself. The same sense is assigned to the word by diplomacy, where an interpolation is a tampering with the text of a public document by one party to it, in order to gain an advantage over the other party.<sup>4</sup>

Many gospel texts of the major religious traditions have been accused of being filled with interpolations. For instance, some parts of the Bible have been suspected to suffer from

interpolations: 'The issue of epistolary integrity and interpolations also affects the extent of the authentic Pauline corpus.'<sup>5</sup> Scholars constantly try to go around these accretions to the original. Nevertheless, there are an almost equal number of scholars always trying to disprove the theory of interpolations in a particular text:

In my years of work with the Corinthian epistles, I have come to appreciate and sometimes to be surprised by the extent to which Paul's epistles were occasional letters which critically engaged competing leaders, factions, practices, and commitments within emergent Christian communities. The texts trace out the debates. So, I have come to be suspicious of those who too highly value conformity, or seem driven by theocratic institutional fantasies which seek to suppress passionate engagement and spirited disagreement in Christian thought and practice.<sup>6</sup>

The problem of interpolation is found in almost all religious traditions as is evident by what this scholar says: 'This again would be the adaptation or interpolation of the Chinese translator, for the original Indian sutra could not possibly have contained this tradition.'<sup>7</sup>

As can be seen from the above, there is always an ongoing tussle between the faithful and the critical academic in locating the authenticity of the religious texts. This is seen in the discussion on another religion too: 'Any method for studying the historical Jesus must take into account the two major tasks of Jesus research, viz. "authentication" and "interpretation".'<sup>8</sup>

### **Original and Authentic: The Uniqueness of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna**

Amidst the many controversies of interpolated gospels and accretions to religious and scriptural texts, rises on the horizon of religious literature, for the first time in human history, a text that has

no secondary thoughts in it, as its writing was orchestrated by the incarnation himself, whose message it contains. Yes, we are talking about Sri Ramakrishna and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The Bible was written years after the passing of the mortal coil of Jesus. The Koran has messages that are not strictly spiritual and those that are religious or spiritual. The Bhagavadgita, is in essence, the recounting by Sanjaya of what happened in the battlefield between Sri Krishna and Arjuna.

It was told to Dhritarashtra when Bhishma was put down on the bed of arrows by Arjuna on the tenth day of the eighteen-day Mahabharata Kurukshetra war.<sup>9</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is completely free of any interpolations or accretions and is the epitome of authenticity.

The recording of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* started in February 1882 and continues till almost a year after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna; the last date recorded being 10



PAINTING: SWAMI TADATMANANDA



Swami Vivekananda in America

May 1887.<sup>10</sup> That M. did not deviate a bit from the actual happenings of events and only recorded them in a vivid manner is attested to by none other than Swami Vivekananda and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, the divine consort of Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji, who was at Dehradun at that time, was ecstatic when he wrote to M. on 24 November 1897, after reading the initial version of the *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*:

My dear M.,

Many many thanks for your second leaflet (leaves from the *Gospel*). It is indeed

wonderful. The move is quite original, and never was the life of a great Teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind, as you are presenting this one. The language also is beyond all praise, so fresh, so pointed, and withal so plain and easy. I cannot express in adequate terms how I have enjoyed the leaflets. I am really in a transport when I read them. Strange, isn't it? Our Teacher and Lord was so original, and each one of us will have to be original or nothing. I now understand why none of us attempted his life before. It has been reserved for you, this great work. He is with you evidently.

Vivekananda

PS. The Socratic dialogues are Plato all over; you are entirely hidden. Moreover, the dramatic part is infinitely beautiful. Everybody likes it here and in the West.<sup>11</sup>

This letter of Swamiji is aphoristic in many ways and each line of his needs elaboration as we would attempt here by stages. For now, it proves the authenticity of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* as attested to by the greatest messenger of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi wrote this in her letter to M. dated 4 July 1897 written from Jayrambati:

My Dear Child,

Whatever you heard from Sri Ramakrishna is indeed the truth. You have nothing to fear there. He himself had given you these things for preservation and it is he who is bringing them in the open now according to the need. Know for certain that people's spiritual consciousness will not be awakened if these words are not brought out. The words of the Master that you have with you are all true. One day,



while I heard these words from you, I felt that it was Sri Ramakrishna who was telling them.<sup>12</sup>

This vindication of the authenticity of the scripture that *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is sets it much above than the general mass of religious corpus available to the world. Authenticity of a religious text has been the Achilles heel

for the faithful and the academic alike for a long time now.

To top it all, Sri Ramakrishna himself had now and then checked the accuracy and sometimes corrected the jottings that M. was making in his mind and his diary. The following conversation that took place on 9 November 1884 is an indicator:

*Sri. Mahendranath Gupta, M. Along with Others*



Master (*smiling*): ‘How did you like today’s conversation?’

M.: ‘Very much indeed.’

Master (*smiling*): ‘How I spoke about the Emperor Akbar!’

M.: ‘It was very good.’

Master: ‘Repeat it to me.’

M.: ‘A fakir came to visit Akbar. The Emperor was saying his prayers. In his prayers he was asking God to give him wealth and riches. Thereupon the fakir was about to leave the room quietly. Later, when the Emperor asked him about it, the fakir said, “If I must beg, why should I beg of a beggar?”’

*Stairs Leading to Sri. M.’s Room in his House*



Master: ‘What else did we talk about?’

M.: ‘You told us a great deal about saving up for the future.’

Master (*smiling*): ‘What did I say?’

M.: ‘As long as a man feels that he must try, he should make an effort. How well you told us about it at Sinthi!’

Master: ‘What did I say?’

M.: ‘God takes upon Himself complete responsibility for one who totally depends upon Him. It is like a guardian taking charge of a minor. You also told us that at a feast a child cannot by himself find a place to eat his meal; someone finds a place for him.’

Master: ‘No, that is not quite to the point. I said that the child doesn’t fall if the father leads him and holds his hand.’<sup>13</sup>

This is probably the first time that the prophet of a religious text has oneself supervised its recording. Sri Ramakrishna practically appointed M. to do the recording. Moreover, the text was recorded then and there by the recorder and was given a concrete shape later on. The contemporaneity of the recording gives the text tremendous authenticity.

### ***The Influence of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna***

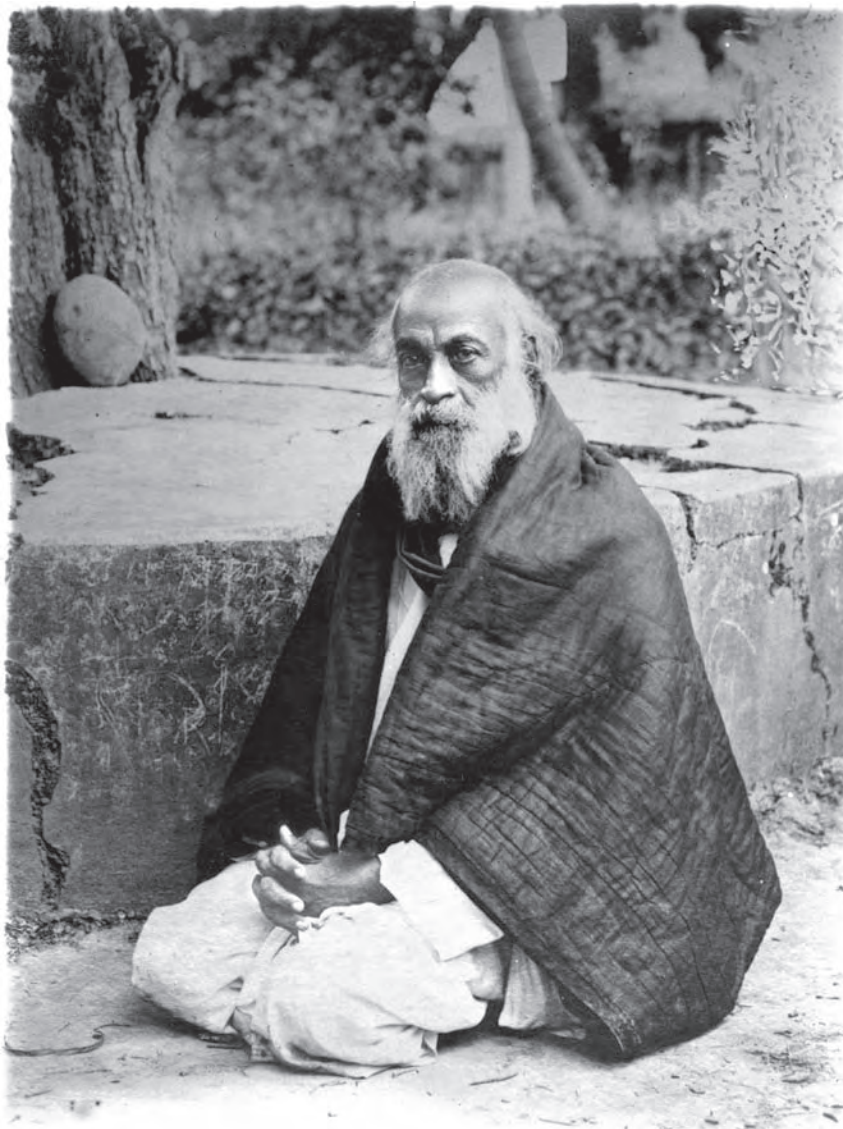
It might be a bit early in this discussion to talk of the influence of this wonderful text. However, before delving into other facets of this book, it would not be out of place to give a glimpse of the enormous and sweeping effect and influence that *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* has had on humanity. The examples discussed here are just representative and are just pointers to the reader to search for more influence and more importantly be also open to be influenced by this book, an influence that will only change one’s life for the better, in whichever direction that might be.

The very nature of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* of being a day by day account of the conversations, activities, and preaching of a religious teacher is so fresh and unparalleled in the history of spiritual literature. This is seen by the inspiration this text gave to another chronicler, who eventually followed in the footsteps of M. and recorded the daily conversations of

Ramana Maharishi, which book also eventually got quite popular:

It was my great good fortune to live for more than four years, from August 1942 till the end of 1946, at Sri Ramanasramam and to have the inestimable benefit of daily contact with our Bhagavan. After I had been there for some months various people who visited the

*Master Mahashay, M. at the Panchavati in Dakshineswar*





Asramam began to suggest that it would be a good thing if I recorded Bhagavan's utterances on spiritual topics, either in answer to questions from visitors or in any other context. For a long time, however, I was too lazy to make the effort. Nevertheless, whenever I read the 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa', as I used to now and then, I felt how desirable it was that a similar book should be compiled in the case of our Bhagavan.<sup>14</sup>

That a religious text not only influences the life of millions, but inspires to follow in the same genre is indeed a great testimony. Recent arenas of writing like the blogosphere have also evinced the influence of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, as can be seen from this blogger's comments:

'M' was head master in a reputed school run by Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. His sharp memory

and devotion helped him in meticulous recording of many incidences, events, and sayings in the life of his Master for the benefit of posterity. He chronicled many wonderful events and sayings of Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar; the account that was later published as 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'. The book is translated in many languages around the world.<sup>15</sup>

Another Muslim blogger writes passionately:

What was it that a young Muslim male like me found in Sri Ramakrishna that was so powerful? In part, it was his expansive view of religion, and initially his short experiment with Islam, which came during his time experiencing different paths of worship, primarily in Hinduism. ... The other thing that pulled me into the world of Sri Ramakrishna was seeing how deeply alive and aware he was in each and every moment. He encountered all types of people

*Navavidhan Brahma Samaj in Kolkata*





and situations in a way that was spontaneous and subtle.<sup>16</sup>

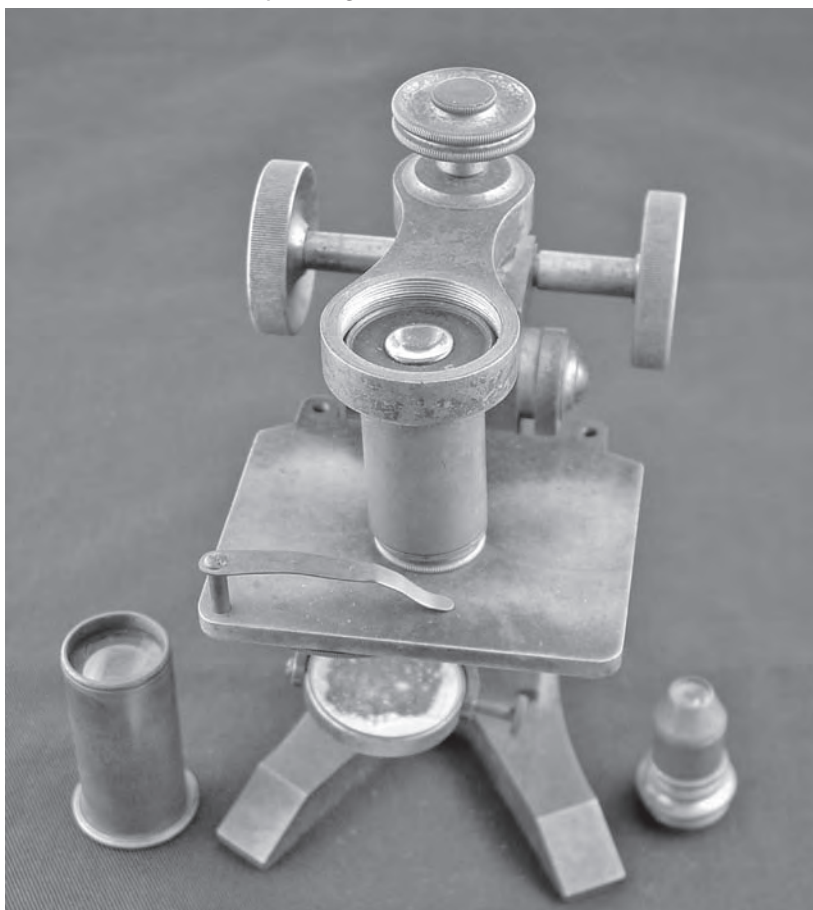
Certainly, the blogosphere is replete with such observations on *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. John Milton Cage Jr. (1912–92) was an American composer and music theorist, who influenced the world of music and dance. This is the story of his study of the *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*:

In April 1948, Cage told a Vassar audience of his recent completion of ‘eighteen months of studying oriental and medieval Christian philosophy and mysticism.’<sup>17</sup> This study, however, revolved not so much around the work of Coomaraswamy as it did *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, a volume recording the life and lessons of an Indian mystic of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This text came to Cage in 1946, shortly after the twenty-five-year-old Geeta Sarabhai arrived in New York from India. Sarabhai had just

finished eight years of study of Hindustani singing, drumming and music theory. Concerned over the ever-increasing threat that western music posed to the propagation of traditional Indian music, she made the trip intending to study this music in order better to comprehend and confront this creeping cultural invasion. One of the first friendships she established in New York was with the artist Isamu Noguchi, who, upon hearing of her plans, led her to Cage’s door. ...

Before returning to India in the latter part of December, Sarabhai gave Cage a copy of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Cage’s study of this text constitutes the second phase of his South Asian studies, and his own recollections of spending the next year reading this material are verified by the reminiscences of friends and colleagues who recount his voracious consumption, some describing chance meetings with Cage on the street in ensuing months, the book securely tucked under his arm.

*Microscope among Sri Ramakrishna’s Used Articles*





Because of the Indian philosophical origins it shares with *The Transformation of Nature in Art*,<sup>18</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* includes many conceptual parallels with Coomaraswamy's writings, and therefore could be considered at least an auxiliary source in Cage's aesthetic development. Unlike *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, however, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is not a volume on aesthetics; consequently, its relation to Cage's artistic thought is relatively tangential. Still, this publication was essential to him, providing inspiration as well as general relief from the tensions surrounding his more personal transitions of the mid-1940s, including his separation and ultimate divorce from Xenia. Cage's own acknowledgments of the text are not aesthetic but consistently personal in nature, describing it as 'a gift from India, which took the place of psychoanalysis'.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* can be a great psychotherapist, and inexpensive too! Let us now look at the various interesting facets of this text.

### **Observation**

The first thing that strikes the reader of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is Sri Ramakrishna's detailed observation; not even a minute detail escapes his eye. It is this uncanny ability to see the profound in the mundane that makes him a seer, an incarnation, and God come as the messenger. And his observations were not strictly limited to the religious: 'I understood the behaviour of women very well and imitated their words and intonations. I could easily recognize immoral women. Immoral widows part their hair in the middle and perform their toilet with great care. They have very little modesty. The way they sit is so different! But let's not talk of worldly things any more.'<sup>20</sup> Observation is key to understanding people and divining their true thoughts. It is of paramount importance in psychology as it 'can give useful information about people and about interactions between people.'<sup>21</sup> *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is a case study in observation.

### **Recording of Evidence**

In line with observation is the collection of evidence. M. declares that he has studied and applied the rules of evidence while recording the *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*: 'People do not realize that at one time I had to study the rules of evidence. If a witness makes a single mistake, the entire case becomes nullified.'<sup>22</sup> What are the rules of evidence? A legal expert has this to say about evidence: 'Of all the various forms of evidence, it is, perhaps, the witness which is the most recognisable.'<sup>23</sup> By that standard, M. more than qualifies to be the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

## Bengal or Indian Renaissance

It is really interesting to note that Sri Ramakrishna, himself considered part of the Bengal or Indian Renaissance, brings in most of the prominent figures of the Renaissance into *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. He touched the heart of the erstwhile society, which was crucial in bringing about a massive change in social, cultural, and religious norms. There are references to and conversations with Keshab Chandra Sen, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Devendranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore, and Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The Brahmo Samaj and many of its followers were drawn by Sri Ramakrishna and also into *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and thereby were unknowingly made part of a great revolution. However, some Brahmo followers like some of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were

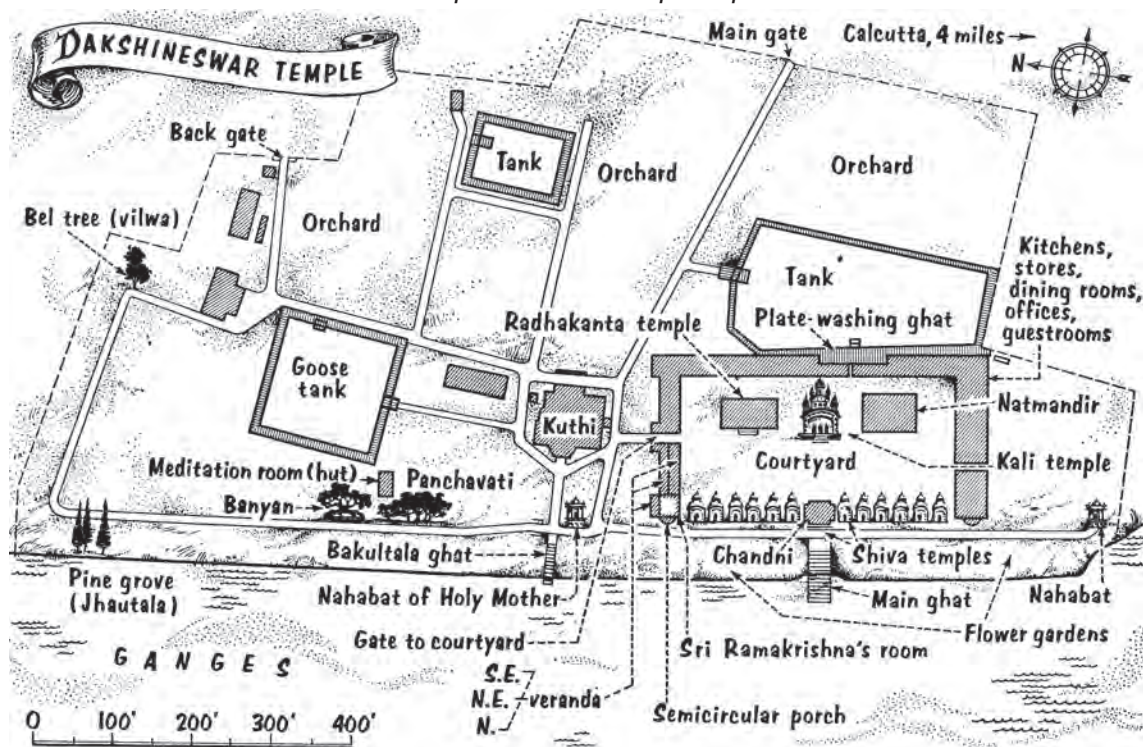
transformed by the very conversations that are recorded in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

## An History of India

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is also a history of erstwhile India as various aspects of life including culture, economy, and even the present political situation find place in the lively discussions of Sri Ramakrishna: For instance: 'You see, Keshab was a great scholar. He lectured in English. Many people honoured him. Queen Victoria herself talked to him.'<sup>24</sup> For instance, we find in the text a mention about a traffic jam that he had to face:

M. had in his hand a bundle of cloths he had purchased for Sri Ramakrishna. Mallick Street was jammed with people, bullock-carts, and carriages. As M. and Gopal approached 12 Mallick Street they noticed Sri Ramakrishna in a

An Old Map of Dakshineswar Temple Compound





carriage, which could hardly move because of the jam. Baburam and Ram Chakravarty were with the Master. He smiled at M. and Gopal. Sri Ramakrishna alighted from the carriage. With Baburam he proceeded on foot to the house of his host, M. leading the way (638).

It seems those days were not any better as far as traffic congestion was concerned! Such details make *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* an invaluable text helpful in understanding or even writing the Indian history of that time. Diaries and daily accounts have a valuable role to play in the writing of history. A beautiful book with colourful illustrations has been written by Dr Jaladhi Kumar Sarkar to preserve the rural history that is contained in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.<sup>25</sup>

### **Songs of Sri Ramakrishna**

The entire text of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is interspersed with various songs sung by Sri Ramakrishna. These songs belong to various traditional genres ranging from the *baul* music, kirtan, to Kali-kirtan. The songs include those composed by Ramprasad and Kamalakanta. This makes the text very vibrant. There have been and continue to be various renditions of the text along with the singing of music whenever a song comes up in the text. Called by various names across India, and even outside India, this form of integrating the scripture and song has a great impact on the listener as well as the reader, though the reader is not getting the benefit of a recital of the song.

There are numerous albums in many languages that are renditions of the songs found in the *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Thus, the text has led to the production of a massive corpus of creative work in a completely different genre. In fact, some would argue that the songs leave a greater impact on the general run of people, who

possess relatively lesser levels of concentration. Seen from the economic angle, these songs have provided livelihood for many across the globe, as of course the print version in its numerous translations has. A recent insightful study emphasises the importance of songs in a religious tradition or religious teaching:

Written texts cannot be viewed as the only source for the understanding of religious movements in practice. For the religious movements that sprouted in Bengal ... songs represent an encyclopedia of beliefs, theological doctrines and yogic practices. Being non-institutional, antinomian and 'Guruist' movements, these religious strands do not recognize any single founder nor a univocal written canon. If anything like a commonly shared canon exists, this would be represented by the corpus of orally transmitted songs.<sup>26</sup> ... Ramakrishna was famous for his performative dimension (88).

It is this performativity of Sri Ramakrishna that stands out in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and makes its reading much more interesting, gripping, enriching, and enlightening than the watching of a movie. However, the reader is also not deprived of any of the rich tapestry of performative expressions that one gets through a film.

### **Dance and Folklore**

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* contains an enormous wealth of information on the Bengal folklore. Frequently, Sri Ramakrishna is also seen to dance with joy and rapture to the tune of a song. The intricacies of music are also discussed in the text: 'In the musical scale there are seven notes: sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, and ni. But one cannot keep one's voice on 'ni' a long time. One must bring it down again to the lower notes.'<sup>27</sup> Sri Ramakrishna continues through this text, the long standing relationship between music and religion.



### Drama

Seen from the angle of performativity, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is full of mimicry, impressions, expressions, gestures, and the many other modes adopted in acting. It could as well qualify as a guidebook for a budding actor! Sri Ramakrishna himself tells about his acting skills:

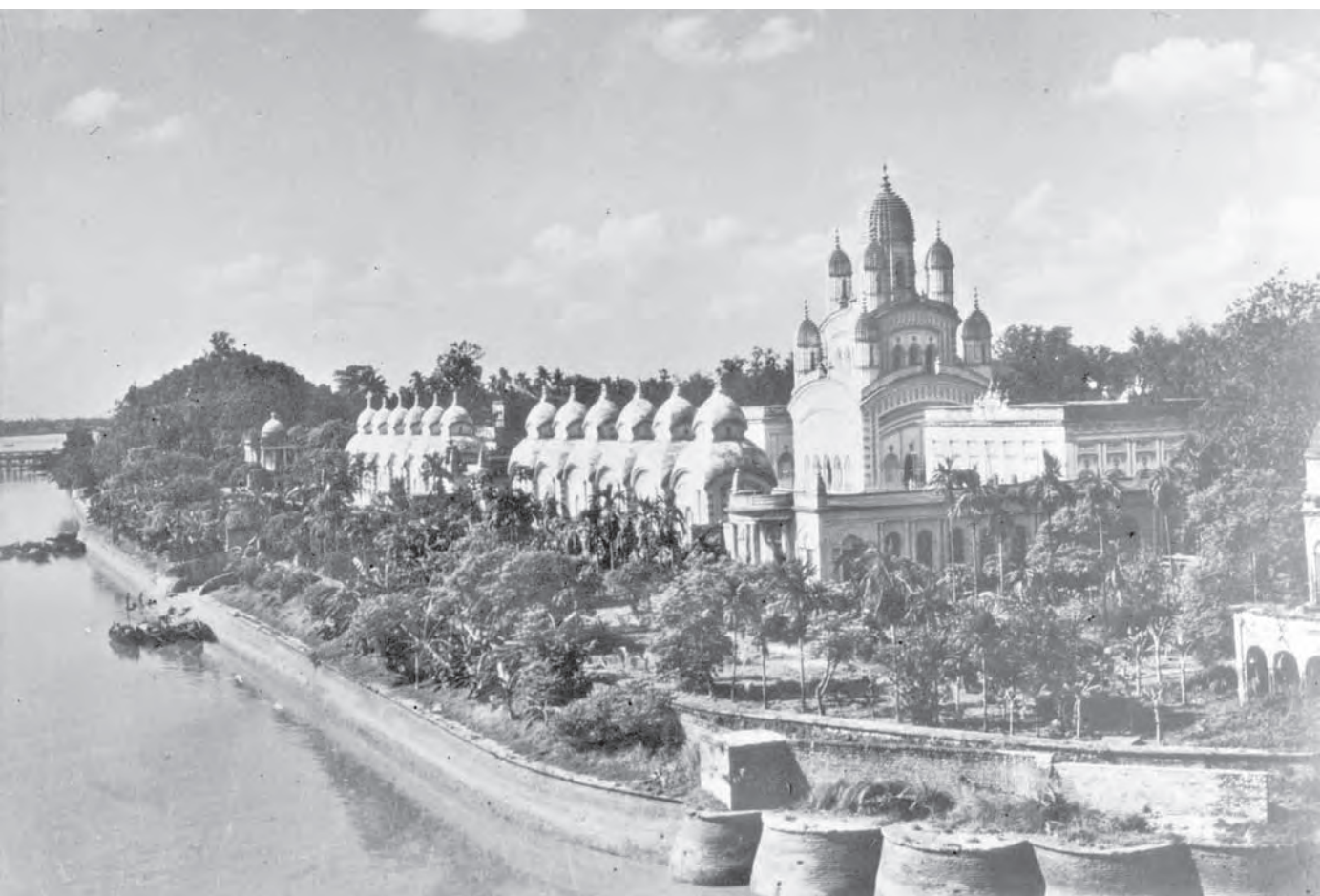
During my younger days the men and women of Kamarpukur were equally fond of me. They loved to hear me sing. I could imitate other people's gestures and conversation, and I used to entertain them that way (239–40).

Once I imitated a professional woman singer

for a man singer. He said my acting was quite correct and asked me where I had learnt it (232).

The beauty of the coexistence of dance and drama in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is that the text is supplemented by performativity. As a scholar rightly points out the 'standard narrative has its purposes. It can contextualise the concept of the performative for those who are relatively new to the topic; its sense of who the most significant figures in this story are is not at all contentious'.<sup>28</sup> In essence, if one were to just immerse oneself in the dance and drama occurring in the text, they would not only get the core message of the text, they would be drawn to its

*Dakshineswar Temple View*



import much more effortlessly, than if they had to do a scholarly analysis of the written narrative. The importance of performativity is succinctly brought by Erving Goffman: 'Ordinary social intercourse is itself put together as a scene is put together, by the exchange of dramatically inflated actions, counteractions, and terminating replies. Scripts even in the hands of unpractised players can come to life because life itself is a dramatically enacted thing. All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify.'<sup>29</sup>

### **Dress**

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* has numerous references to various dressing habits of people in erstwhile Bengal and elsewhere. Sri Ramakrishna once again comes out as an expert observer when he comments on the English dress: 'If even a sickly man puts on high boots, he begins to whistle and climbs the stairs like an Englishman, jumping from one step to another' (168). Different ways of dressing are also mentioned: 'The kirtani is dressed lavishly and covered with ornaments. She sings, standing on the floor, a coloured kerchief in her hand. Now and then she coughs to draw people's attention and blows her nose, raising her nose-ring. When a respectable gentleman enters the room, she welcomes him with appropriate words, still continuing her song. Now and then she pulls her sari from her arms to show off her jewels' (717).

Paucity of space prevents us from looking at more examples of each feature of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, but they are hinted at here, as far possible.

### **The Ganga**

Throughout the text of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* the Ganga appears as though it were a lifeline to the central theme of the text. There is

even a description of his boat ride with Keshab Chandra Sen, which was quite an event (132–144). The text frequently mentions about the different tides of Ganga.

### **Flora and Fauna**

The entire text is replete with references to various flora and fauna. For instance, we have the description about the behaviour of crows: 'The crow, too, thinks he is a clever bird; but the first thing he does when he wakes up in the early morning is to fill his stomach with nothing but others' filth' (669–70.) There is mention of flowers: 'These are white, like mallika flowers, without the slightest stain on them' (857). There is the description of different trees like the *bakul* and the banyan. The text is also full of references to aquatic creatures, primarily different kinds of fish, so much so that a separate work on it can be compiled!

### **Philosophies**

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* carries a simple but insightful introduction and explanation to various philosophies like Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita, Advaita, and several other philosophical systems. Critics who look down at Sri Ramakrishna's lack of formal schooling would do well to go through these philosophical exegeses to become free from the binding notion that learning can come only from tomes! An example of easy illustration of a philosophical concept is given here: 'What Brahman is cannot be described. All things in the world the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, the six systems of philosophy—have been defiled, like food that has been touched by the tongue, for they have been read or uttered by the tongue. Only one thing has not been defiled in this way, and that is Brahman. No one has ever been able to say what Brahman is' (102).

### Religious Traditions and Sects

In the text, we find mention of various sects and religious traditions, many not so popular. For instance: ‘In the Kartabhaja sect, the teacher, while giving initiation, says to the disciple, “Now everything depends on your mind” According to this sect, “He who has the right mind finds the right way and also achieves the right end”’ (204). Now, how many people would have known that? We also find mention of sects that are vibrant till today. The text also speaks of many monastic traditions.

### Oral Tradition

Keeping in line with the tradition of oral transmission of knowledge as in the Vedas and many other religious texts, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is a very good example of the oral transmission of knowledge, both spiritual and secular. It is also an oral account of history that has been put in the written form later. The study of this text as oral history or oral transmission has not been done, at least not in depth, till date.

The need to study oral histories and oral transmissions of knowledge is becoming paramount

*Twelve Shiva Temples in the Dakshineswar Temple Compound*





today as we have devised newer tools of preserving information. The importance of oral pedagogy in maintaining peace is stressed upon by some scholars:

Oral history encourages students to consider the significance and deeper messages of historical events ... these while also offering them the means to be critical consumers, rather than passive observers of historical analysis. It is in this vein that oral history holds great potential for peace education, although few scholars have articulated these connections both theoretically and practically. ... Oral history as a historical methodology offers students the ability to deconstruct and construct narratives about past conflicts that can serve a more peaceable future. While there is a wealth of literature that examines collective memory for peace education, there has been limited discussion by scholars about the role of oral history. Oral history has a contested range of meanings that extend from 'knowledge about the past that is relayed by word of mouth from one generation to the next' to 'the practice of recording, archiving, and analyzing eyewitness testimony and life histories'. Nevertheless, what most oral historians agree upon is that it is a 'powerful tool to engage people in the discovery and making of history and in the critical assessment of how stories about the past are created'.

Peace education, rooted in positive peace, foregrounds injustice and the empowerment of those who are marginalized. Peace pedagogy requires methods that deeply engage students in complicating and opening up historical narratives in as democratic a way as possible. Oral history is part of a global movement to democratize the past.

Documenting conflicting oral histories within a community characterized by positive peace speaks to the pedagogy of peace. Here, the school itself acted as a community of learners, with the principal, teachers, and students all involved in empathetically and

collaboratively collecting narratives and re-storying events. Moreover, the project required students to engage in a broad range of challenging skills: active listening, reflective and critical analysis, values clarification, conflict management, and respectful problem-posing. Students cooperatively gathered conflicting oral histories that figured prominently in the life of their community. Such an oral history project is peace education that is both personal and communal, where the systemic structures that shape peoples' opinions and actions were laid bare for students, potentially promoting new respectful relationships.<sup>30</sup>

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* has great potential to be taught as a text for peacebuilding in society, something that we need very much in these polarised times of ours.

The power of the spoken word, particularly in the context of religion, is brought out by a scholar:

It should be evident that the primacy and power of the oral word are not limited to nonliterate or archaic stages of culture and religion. In virtually every society, truth is bound up in significant ways with the spoken word, whether the word is that of a divinity or that of a human sage or teacher. This is still true to a surprising degree even in modern typographic, technocentric culture. Here also, one still has to learn from others, and not insignificantly through oral means. The premium placed today upon finding and developing 'communicators' and using their 'human skills' in modern industrial hiring and business training bespeaks more than merely the presence of ambitious social scientists trying to justify a field of study such as 'organizational behavior'. It is a sign of how much more is needed to keep a highly developed society operating beyond simple 'book-learning ... or, for that matter, computer-learning'.

Nevertheless, it is especially in traditional cultures around the world that the fundamental link between the spoken word and truth is all but indissoluble—not because oral



transmission and communication are practically or technically superior to written forms, but because most traditional cultures see the loci (but not necessarily the origins) of both truth and authority primarily in persons and their utterances, not in documents and records. In such contexts, the teacher who knows the sacred text by heart and has devoted his or her life to studying and explicating it is the one and only reliable guarantor of the sacred truth. The power of the holy word is realized only through the human word of the seer, prophet, or spiritual master, not through a manuscript, even where the latter is also important. However exalted its status in a particular tradition, the written text alone is typically worthless, or at least worth

little, without a human teacher to transmit both it and the traditions of learning and interpretation associated with it.

To be reckoned as scripture, whether in its written or oral form, any text must be perceived in some sense as a prime locus of verbal contact with transcendent truth, or ultimate reality. In theocentric traditions, scripture is preeminently 'the place where God speaks to men', and the historical tendency for this speech to be conceived of as a unitary whole, as a single text or 'book', is especially strong in these contexts. On the other hand, in nontheistic or semitheistic traditions, scripture tends to be more readily conceived of as the cumulative record of the teachings of sages or holy persons,

*Kashipur Garden House where Sri Ramakrishna Spent his Last Days*





*Sri Ramakrishna on the Kalpataru Day at Kashipur as Displayed in the Ramakrishna Museum, Belur Math.*

however unitary the truth of these teachings *is* ultimately perceived to be. It is in scripture that the primordial wisdom heard and taught by generations of prophets or spiritual teachers is preserved, and in the ongoing tradition of oral teaching, be it of the Buddha-word (*buddhavacana*) or of the Vedic *mantras*, scripture comes alive only as the sacred word of truth spoken, and *only* spoken, by teacher to pupil. Here especially the role of scripture as oral word takes on central significance within the larger tradition.<sup>31</sup>

Does *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* qualify as a scripture? Of course, and in the light of the above observations, it is indeed an oral scripture as much as it is a written one.

## **An Autobiographical Account**

It is common to see accounts of daily conversations with a prominent person take the shape of some kind of autobiography. The same is true of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which gives a rich account of Sri Ramakrishna's life through his own words. Such utterances have enabled the compilation of a book titled *Sri Ramakrishna On Himself*.<sup>32</sup>

## **Food**

The text has copious references to different kinds of food, made in the characteristic style of Sri Ramakrishna: 'The mother brings home a fish for her children. She curries part of the fish, part she fries, and with another part she makes pilau. By no means all can digest the pilau. So she makes fish soup for those who have weak stomachs. Further, some want pickled or fried fish.'<sup>33</sup>

## **Intertextuality**

In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, we find various sentences, verses, observations, and comments by M., the recorder. These valuable inter-texts contextualise the utterances of Sri Ramakrishna. Intertextuality as a tool has not been used much in traditional scriptures and this almost immediate interpretation of the sayings of the Master helps the reader, who would be otherwise lost in the maze of this lengthy text. Some examples are given here:

A devotee told M. that the Master was in samadhi. M. had never before seen or heard of such a thing. Silent with wonder, he thought: 'Is it possible for a man to be so oblivious of the outer world in the consciousness of God? How deep his faith and devotion must be to bring about such a state!' (89).

In the mean time the Master was having great fun with the boys, treating them as if they were his most intimate friends. Peals of side-splitting laughter filled the room, as if it were a



mart of joy. The whole thing was a revelation to M. He thought: 'Didn't I see him only yesterday intoxicated with God? Wasn't he swimming then in the Ocean of Divine Love—a sight I had never seen before? And today the same person is behaving like an ordinary man! Wasn't it he who scolded me on the first day of my

coming here? Didn't he admonish me, saying, 'And you are a man of knowledge!'? Wasn't it he who said to me that God with form is as true as God without form? Didn't he tell me that God alone is real and all else illusory? Wasn't it he who advised me to live in the world unattached, like a maidservant in a rich man's house?' (90).

*Samadhi of Sri. M. at the spot where his Body was Cremated at Kashipur Cremation Ghat*



The importance of intertextuality in an important spiritual text like *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* cannot be overemphasised. The concept of intertextuality is situated by a scholar:

The idea that when we read a work of literature we are seeking to find a meaning which lies inside that work seems completely commonsensical.

Literary texts possess meaning; readers extract that meaning from them. We call the process of extracting meaning from texts reading or interpretation. Despite their apparent obviousness, such ideas have been radically challenged in contemporary literary and cultural theory. Works of literature, after all, are built from systems, codes and traditions established by

*The Camera Apparatus Used to take the First Photograph of Sri Ramakrishna, now Displayed at Ramakrishna Math, Shyampukur*





previous works of literature. The systems, codes and traditions of other art forms and of culture in general are also crucial to the meaning of a work of literature. Texts, whether they be literary or non-literary, are viewed by modern theorists as lacking in any kind of independent meaning. They are what theorists now call intertextual. The act of reading, theorists claim, plunges us into a network of textual relations. To interpret a text, to discover its meaning, or meanings, is to trace those relations. Reading thus becomes a process of moving between texts. Meaning becomes something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates, moving out from the independent text into a network of textual relations. The text becomes the intertext.<sup>34</sup>

Intertextuality attains a different meaning and significance when seen in scriptures: 'Receiving back a whole ... [scripture] is one of the pros of the contemporary emphasis on intertextuality, but not the only one. This emphasis reinforces the importance of the contemporary application of Scripture, reminding us that no reader ever reads the text in a vacuum, but always comes to the text with his or her own baggage of questions and prejudices.'<sup>35</sup> The same scholar has a word of caution too:

Contemporary literary approaches to the text have tended to overshadow the historical-critical methodology that has been the dominant modern mode of discourse in academic dialogue, and even sometimes rejecting it outright. Given the largely negative impact of historical-critical discourse on the acceptance of conservative positions, this trend would hardly seem to be a loss to some conservatives. On the other hand, 'historical criticism generally pursues the authentication of the non-fictional text ... Literary criticism, in contrast, focuses on fiction'. If we are concerned that historical critics have tended to minimise the historicity of Scripture, nothing would seem to be gained by supporting



*Rasik Mehtar Seeking Refuge at Sri Ramakrishna's Feet*

a method that reclassifies it as fictional rather than as non-fictional, for 'the commitment to historical validation' is not 'simply a fundamentalist aberration that we happen to share, interestingly enough, with higher critics. We take this position, as the critics do, because the ... [scripture] takes it.' The conservative scholar must thus always remain engaged with the historical issues raised by the text. In other words, such scholars must remain engaged with the sort of issues that historical critics have raised, even if rejecting many of their conclusions.

Another con to the contemporary emphasis on intertextuality is that final authority is often seen as lying with the reader rather than with the author. This approach raises a serious challenge to the conservative position that the ... [scriptural] writers were inspired rather than

their receptor communities. It also has the potential to introduce a dangerous subjectivity into the interpretation of the text (4–5).

### Mythology

The text brings into focus much of mythology that would have been otherwise unknown, at least to Indian readers. The classic example is that of the homa bird: ‘The Vedas speak of the homa bird. It lives high up in the sky and there it

lays its egg. As soon as the egg is laid it begins to fall; but it is so high up that it continues to fall for many days. As it falls it hatches, and the chick falls. As the chick falls its eyes open; it grows wings. As soon as its eyes open, it realizes that it is falling and will be dashed to pieces on touching the earth. Then it at once shoots up toward the mother bird high in the sky.’<sup>36</sup> This bird is an important mythological bird of Iran or Persia and is ‘the Homa—the bird of victory whose plume adorned the crowns of Iranian kings.’<sup>37</sup>

Sri M.’s House at Telipara, Shyampukur



### Language

The language of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is fresh, lively, vibrant, and precise. It is as though Sri Ramakrishna and M. underwent training in writing. However, we do not know of any writing workshops that they attended! Those who are established in truth have a precise and concise way of expressing things and do not need any training whatsoever. The language of the text is rustic, sometimes bordering on the vulgar, especially in light of the artificial civility that we pose in the present-day world. All expressions are candid, short, and to the point.

The text has a humane feeling throughout, with humour, parables, metaphors, and similes all over. Sri Ramakrishna excels in imparting spirituality through everyday examples and stories. Great authors and poets would be put to shame in front of his natural aptitude for similes and metaphors. Also, the language has an inbuilt psychoanalytic method that pierces through one’s mind and speaks to the soul. A master conversationalist, Sri Ramakrishna gives lessons on public speaking and confidence-building through the pages of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

### Inclusiveness

The text is so all-inclusive that it overwhelms the reader. No one is marginalised and

probably for the first time in the history of spiritual literature, the female gender is not despised, though male and female are cautioned about the pitfalls of too much mixing with the opposite gender. Sri Ramakrishna's feminist underpinnings, if one could use that phrase, are beautifully portrayed by Ann Myren in *Images of Divinity*.<sup>38</sup>

The first questions that Sri Ramakrishna asked M. show his respect for women, because he gets agitated when M. says that his wife is ignorant. Also, in that first conversation, Sri Ramakrishna makes it clear that true education might not have anything to do with formal education.

The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna are for all, without any kind of distinction. Once, a person came all the way from Sindh to meet Sri Ramakrishna:

Hirananda came in with two of his friends. He was a native of Sindh, about twenty-two hundred miles from Calcutta. After finishing his college education in Calcutta in 1883, he had returned to Sindh and taken charge of editing two papers, the *Sindh Times* and the *Sind Sudhar*. While studying in Calcutta he had often visited Keshab Chandra Sen and had come to know him intimately. He had met Sri Ramakrishna at the Kali temple at Dakshineswar and had spent an occasional night there with the Master. Hearing of Sri Ramakrishna's illness, he now came to Calcutta from Sindh to see him. The Master himself had been very eager to see Hirananda.<sup>39</sup>

### **A Lesson in Hermeneutics**

In its own way *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is a master text for understanding the interpretation of texts to arrive at their meaning. Yes, we are talking about the discipline of hermeneutics here. Sri Ramakrishna interprets various passages from the scriptures and gives them clear and concise meaning. In fact, his interpretation



Swami Bhuteshananda (1901–98)

and retelling of the scriptures texts has prompted many authors to correlate his sayings with scriptural passages and create volumes of scholarship!<sup>40</sup> The text has been commented upon and many other details have been told in the enriching conversations that have been compiled in the sixteen volumes of *Srima Darshan*.<sup>41</sup> There is also a masterly commentary on *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by Swami Bhuteshananda, who was the twelfth president of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.<sup>42</sup>

The need to have more and more commentaries and exegeses on this wonderful text cannot be overemphasised. In the context of scriptural studies, hermeneutics holds an important place as attested to by this scholar:



Hermeneutics is centrally concerned with the mediation between different domains of meaning and with the possibilities of both understanding and misunderstanding which arise therein. It originates in the mediation of meaningful utterances understood as arising from a suprahuman, divine domain and communities of those whose mode of life and form of existence were understood to be in some way instituted by this divine source. In that sense, hermeneutics has its origins in the interpretation of the divine. While the etymological connection with the god Hermes may be doubtful, clearly in conceptual terms hermeneutics bears the mark of this interpretive effort

of understanding enigmatic, apparently inscrutable, divine communications. That which requires interpretation in this way can be oral or written, but it has a text-like quality in the sense of being preserved as meaningful beyond the situation of its utterance. Crucial here is the relation between tradition and experience, mediating between a past event of divine communication expressed in written form and the present experience of those reading and applying that text.<sup>43</sup>

The relation between hermeneutics and psychoanalysis is outlined here:

The presence in the therapeutic process of

*Pandit Ishvar Chandra Vidyasagar's House in Kolkata*



different forces from those of rationality, and the presence of different dynamics from those of reflexive communication hinder the full connection between the psychoanalytical work and the critical philosopher, suggesting a less enlightened conception of human emancipation. The rationalist optimism of Habermas is compatible with psychoanalysis maintaining the look of the analyst, the subject of psychoanalytical discourse. The attempt to extend this look to the object can be defined as an attempt at rationalisation: on the one hand, it makes the linguistic and hermeneutical hypothesis of depth psychology sustainable, but on the other it cancels and denies that which by its nature is trapped outside the sphere of language and rationality—the instinctual, the irrational, the pre-symbolic, the emotional, the passionate and the affective. Thus, although it is true that the essential condition of emancipation is the work of reflection (into critical communication, into auto-reflection), on the other side, precisely in light of psychoanalysis, we know that there can be no true emancipation if the meeting is not powered by a genuine human interest, and if the exchange is not likely to traverse the deep emotional and instinctual sphere. That is to say, everything that makes a human being a human being. The look from the I as the object of psychoanalytical discourse evaluates the Habermasian proposal as a diminished perspective of psychoanalysis, if not as anti-psychoanalysis.<sup>44</sup>

Hermeneutics and one's experience has been contextualised nicely by another scholar:

If we take the word 'experience' (*Erfahrung*) in its most genuine sense, experiences are not made, initiated, or controlled by ourselves, but they are events that we undergo and that transform us more or less radically. Taken in this hermeneutical and historical sense, our experiences of the divine, the world, others, and ourselves are manifold and impossible to reduce to the unity of a single discipline. The same is true of the names that humans have invented

in order to speak of gods and the divine. Both the experiences and the names are deposited in *traditions* that we have inherited and that still determine our life-forms and ways of existing.<sup>45</sup>

The discipline of hermeneutics is thus one to be had recourse to in order to understand more clearly the import of any scriptural text, much so *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

### **A Guidebook: Spiritual and Secular**

There are detailed descriptions of yoga practice in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Patanjali's yoga system combined with kundalini practices are given throughout the text. For instance:

Yoga is not possible if the mind dwells on 'woman and gold'. The mind of a worldly man generally moves among the three lower centres: those at the navel, at the sexual organ, and at the organ of evacuation. After great effort and spiritual practice the Kundalini is awakened. According to the yogis there are three nerves in the spinal column: Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. Along the Sushumna are six lotuses, or centres, the lowest being known as the Muladhara. Then come successively Svadhisthana, Manipura, Anahata, Visuddha, and Ajna. These are the six centres. The Kundalini, when awakened, passes through the lower centres and comes to the Anahata, which is at the heart. It stays there. At that time the mind of the aspirant is withdrawn from the three lower centres. He feels the awakening of Divine Consciousness and sees Light. In mute wonder he sees that radiance and cries out: 'What is this? What is this?'

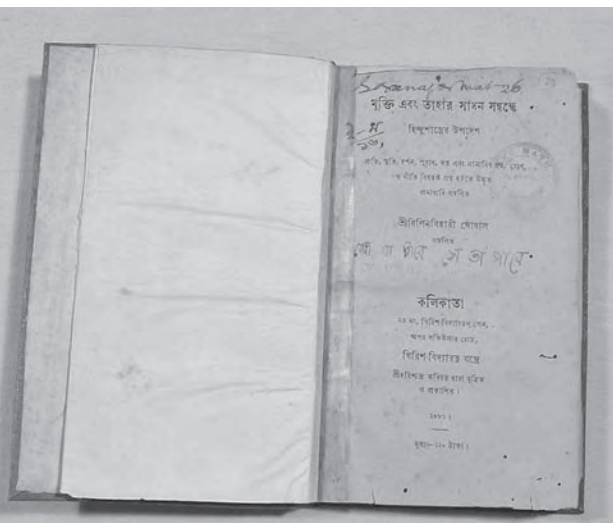
After passing through the six centres, the Kundalini reaches the thousand-petalled lotus known as the Sahasrara, and the aspirant goes into samadhi. 'According to the Vedas these centres are called 'bhumi', 'planes'. There are seven such planes. The centre at the heart corresponds to the fourth plane of the Vedas. According to the Tantra there is in this centre a lotus called Anahata, with twelve petals.

The centre known as Visuddha is the fifth plane. This centre is at the throat and has a lotus with sixteen petals. When the Kundalini reaches this plane, the devotee longs to talk and hear only about God. Conversation on worldly subjects, on 'woman and gold', causes him great pain. He leaves a place where people talk of these matters.

Then comes the sixth plane, corresponding to the centre known as Ajna. This centre is located between the eyebrows and it has a lotus with two petals. When the Kundalini reaches it, the aspirant sees the form of God. But still there remains a slight barrier between the devotee and God. It is like a light inside a lantern. You may think you have touched the light, but in reality you cannot because of the barrier of glass.

And last of all is the seventh plane, which, according to Tantra, is the centre of the thousand-petalled lotus. When the Kundalini arrives there, the aspirant goes into samadhi. In that lotus dwells Satchidananda Siva, the Absolute. There Kundalini, the awakened Power, unites with Siva. This is known as the union of Siva and Sakti.

**The book Mukti Ebang Tahar Sadhan Sambandhe, About Moksha and its Means, in Bengali, compiled by Sri Bipin Behari Ghoshal, in 1881, was kept in Sri Ramakrishna's Room**

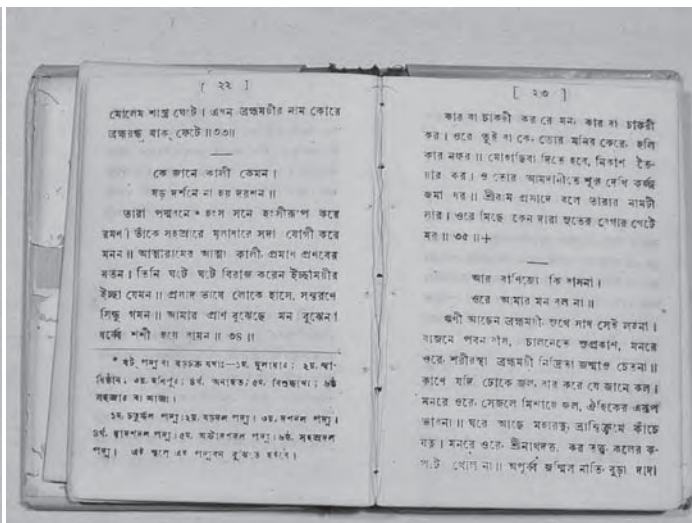


When the Kundalini rises to the Sahasrara and the mind goes into samadhi, the aspirant loses all consciousness of the outer world. He can no longer retain his physical body. If milk is poured into his mouth, it runs out again. In that state the life-breath lingers for twenty-one days and then passes out. Entering the 'black waters' of the ocean, the ship never comes-back. But the Isvarakotis, such as the Incarnations of God, can come down from this state of samadhi. They can descend from this exalted state because they like to live in the company of devotees and enjoy the love of God. God retains in them the 'ego of Knowledge' or the 'ego of Devotion' so that they may teach men. Their minds move between the sixth and the seventh planes. They run a boat-race back and forth, as it were, between these two planes.

After attaining samadhi some souls of their own accord keep the 'ego of Knowledge'. But that ego does not create any attachment. It is like a line drawn on the water.<sup>46</sup>

What a graphic and easily understandable explanation of the one of the most difficult, mystical, and esoteric, spiritual disciplines! That is the true genius of Sri Ramakrishna and his gospel.

**Prasad Prasanga, Prasadi Sangeet Bhajan and Short Life of Ramprasad Sen, in Bengali, in 1865, Sri Ramakrishna presented this book to Dr Mahendralal Sarkar.**





Throughout the text of this wonderful book, we find instructions on developing one's soft-skills. Sprinkled across the text are nuggets of worldly wisdom too, that is, guidelines on how to conduct oneself in the world. Hence, if someone reads *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, they would definitely become a good human being if not a good spiritual aspirant. There is much material for getting self-help, inspiration, or encouragement. A depressed soul can get the nectar of the *Kathamrita*, the original Bengali name of the text that means 'ambrosial words'.

The text contains ample references to the environment and one gets an idea of the immanent divinity that Sri Ramakrishna witnessed all the time and naturally, that immanence includes the environment, and hence a love for the environment is generated in the minds of the readers. He also betrays his knowledge of medicine: 'A gangrenous sore requires very drastic treatment. Ordinary medicine won't cure it' (769). Or: 'You know that medicine works only when it mixes with the patient's blood and becomes one with it' (776). There is more: 'The kavirajs prepare makaradhvaja in a bottle. The bottle is covered with clay and heated in the fire. The gold inside the bottle melts and combines with the other ingredients, and the medicine is made. Then the physicians break the bottle carefully and take out the medicine' (237). Sri Ramakrishna is a physician of the body, mind, and the soul, and he knows how to prepare the medicines too!

For all these reasons, one could very well say that *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is a *shruti* and *smriti* combined into one; the only major difference being that both of these kinds of words issue from the lips of the Lord himself, his incarnation in the form of Sri Ramakrishna.

In this text, Sri Ramakrishna recounts most of his spiritual experiences and this is a great boon to a spiritual aspirant because one can see and

understand what happens in each stage of spiritual experience. A good compilation of all these experiences has long been put in a book form by Swami Yogeshananda.<sup>47</sup>

The Bhagavata has this verse: '*Narayanam namaskritya naram chaiva narottamam, devam sarasvatim vyasam tato jayam udirayet*'; before reciting this Bhagavata, which is the very means of conquest, one should offer respectful obeisances unto the personality of godhead, Narayana, unto Nara-Narayana rishi, the supermost human being, unto mother Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, and unto sage Vyasa, the author.'<sup>48</sup>

In this age, Sri Ramakrishna has come as the incarnation of Narayana, the Lord himself. As told by Sri Ramakrishna himself, he has brought the Rishi Nara in the form of Swami Vivekananda and Goddess Sarasvati in the form of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. He has also brought his scribe along in the form of Mahendranath Gupta, M. Let his blessings shower on all the readers of this priceless treasure of a scripture, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, so that one can attain the knowledge of Brahman or God realisation by a devoted study of the text, as has been assured by many learned monks, who also attained the knowledge of God through the same path.



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*Oil Painting of Mother Kali, on Canvas, Used by Sri Ramakrishna*



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# *The History of Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*

Swami Chetanananda

*North-Eastern Corner of Sri Ramakrishna's Room in Dakshineswar*

**S**RI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITA is known all over the world as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.<sup>1</sup> The word *gospel* comes from *godspell* or *goodspell*, which means glad tidings or good news. This good news uplifts human minds. Innumerable people from all over the world read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*

every day and get peace and joy from the divine life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. But very few people know the life of the recorder and history of the *Gospel*. In this article, the background, environment, and the history of Mahendra Nath Gupta (M.)'s *Kathamrita* are discussed.

Some of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings have been recorded differently by different writers. Although each of his teachings is the same, the wording and language he used were different.

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Stories have been recorded in more or less detail, depending on the writer. When we read the Bible, we find the same phenomenon. The same teachings or stories of Jesus were recorded differently by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The wording of each gospel is different; some stories provide more details than others. It is quite natural for two persons to see and hear the same thing at the same time and yet record different descriptions of the event.

The first gospel of Sri Ramakrishna was recorded in 1878 by Girish Chandra Sen, a disciple of the Brahmo leader Keshab Chandra Sen; it consists of 184 of the Master's teachings. The second gospel was recorded in 1884 by Suresh

*Sri M. in his Younger Days*



Chandra Datta, a householder devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, and comprises 950 teachings of the Master. The third gospel was recorded in 1885 by Ram Chandra Datta, a householder devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. It consists of 300 teachings of the Master. The fourth gospel was recorded in diary form by M.—Mahendra Nath Gupta—from 1882 to 1886. Published in five volumes between 1902 and 1932, it has 177 entries. The fifth and last gospel was recorded by Swami Brahmananda, a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. It was published serially from 1898 to 1900 in *Udbodhan*. In 1905 these teachings were collected in a book, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Upadesh*, containing 248 teachings of the Master.

All of these gospels were recorded in Bengali, Sri Ramakrishna's mother tongue. The first three of these gospels have not yet been translated into English in their entirety. M.'s record was published in five volumes, which in 1942 was published in English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Swami Nikhilananda of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre in New York translated this huge work and Aldous Huxley wrote the foreword. The gospel according to Swami Brahmananda was translated into English and edited by Jnanendra Nath Mukhopadhyay and F J Alexander as *Words of the Master* and published by Udbodhan Publication Office, Calcutta, in 1924.

The Master's teachings were so impressive and instructive that Swami Shivananda, as a young disciple, had felt tempted to take notes. He recalled:

One day at Dakshineswar I was listening to [the Master] and looking intently at his face. He was explaining many beautiful things. Noticing my keen interest, the Master suddenly said: 'Look here! Why are you listening so attentively?' I was taken by surprise. He then added: 'You don't have to do that. Your life is different. I felt as if the Master had divined my intention



to keep notes and did not approve of it, and that was why he had spoken in that way. From that time on I gave up the idea of taking notes of his conversations, and whatever notes I already had I threw into the Ganga.<sup>2</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna advised his young monastic disciples to renounce both externally and internally; and he advised his householder disciples to renounce internally. Many years later Swami Premananda related how the Master taught the monastic disciples: ‘Very little of the Master’s teachings is recorded in the *Gospel*, he said. ‘M. used to visit the Master occasionally and would note down his teachings as he heard them. ... His teachings to the monastic disciples were given in private. As soon as the householder devotees would leave the room, he would get up and lock the door and then speak to us living words of renunciation. He would try to impress upon our young minds the emptiness and vanity of worldly enjoyments.’<sup>3</sup>

### The Origin of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

M. based his *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*—*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*—on his diary entries from 26 February 1882 to 10 May 1887. He began to develop his diaries for publication within a couple of years after the Master’s passing away, but he did not make all of the entries public. On 11 July 1888 M. read a chapter of the *Kathamrita* to the Holy Mother, who was then living in Nilambar Babu’s garden house in Belur. After she heard this reading from the manuscript, she praised M. and encouraged him to write more. On 15 March 1890 M. read another chapter to the Holy Mother and received her blessings and approval to publish it.

In 1892 a small pamphlet of twenty pages was released under the title ‘Paramahamsadever Ukti: Part 3’ by ‘Satchidananda Gitaratna’, and collected

by ‘Sadhu Mahindranath Gupta.’<sup>4</sup> Swami Vivekananda read this pamphlet<sup>5</sup> and wrote to M. from Antpur on 7 February 1889: ‘Thanks! 100,000 times, Master! You have hit Ramkristo in the right point. Few alas, few understand him!! My heart leaps in joy—and it is a wonder that I do not go mad when I find anybody thoroughly launched into the midst of the doctrine which is to show peace on earth hereafter.’<sup>6</sup>

M. was busy with family duties, so he could not always concentrate on developing his diaries for publication. On 26 November 1895, the Holy Mother wrote to M. from Kamarpukur: ‘Please preserve those teachings of the Master which he left with you.’ M. was inspired by her letter to publish *Leaves from the Gospel of the Lord Sri Ramakrishna*, which came out serially in the English-language *Brahmavadin* magazine starting from 15 October 1897.

Swamiji read the series and wrote to M. from Rawalpindi in October 1897: ‘Dear M., *C’est bon, mon ami*—now you are doing just the thing. Come out, man! No sleeping all life; time is flying. Bravo! That is the way. Many thanks for your publication. Only, I am afraid it will not pay its way in a pamphlet form. ... Never mind, pay or no pay—let it see the blaze of daylight. You will have many blessings on you and many more curses—but that is always the way of the world, sir. This is the time.’<sup>7</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna said: ‘When, hearing the name of Hari or Rama once, you shed tears and your hair stands on end, then you may know for certain that you do not have to perform such devotions as the sandhya any more. Then only will you have a right to renounce rituals; or rather, rituals will drop away of themselves.’

—M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 77.

Swamiji wrote to M. again on 24 November 1897, this time from Dehradun:

My dear M., Many many thanks for your second leaflet (leaves from the Gospel). It is indeed wonderful. The move is quite original, and never was the life of a great Teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind, as you are presenting this one. The language also is beyond all praise, so fresh, so pointed, and withal so plain and easy. I cannot express in adequate terms how I have enjoyed the leaflets. I am really in a transport when I read them. Strange, isn't it? Our Teacher and Lord was so original, and each one of us will have to be original or nothing. I now understand why none of us attempted his life before. It has been reserved for you, this great work. He is with you evidently.

PS. The Socratic dialogues are Plato all over; you are entirely hidden. Moreover, the dramatic part is infinitely beautiful. Everybody likes it here and in the West (5.140).

After M. began publishing the Master's teachings in English in a pamphlet form, a critic wrote in *Tattvamanjari* magazine: 'We have a request to Mr. Gupta to publish these teachings in a big book form instead of in small pamphlets that will

*Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's House in Jayrambati*

benefit the masses. Again, we wonder, why did he publish it in English instead of Bengali? It is needless to remind him that sometimes the spirit of such deep spiritual truths diminishes while translating them into English. It would be difficult for our people to understand these teachings.'<sup>8</sup> M. later acquiesced to the critic's request.

This criticism, however, was nothing compared to the appreciation that M. received from many distinguished reviewers. The English-language pamphlets created a tremendous stir because readers found Sri Ramakrishna's teachings new and exciting. But M. eventually decided to publish *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in Bengali, so that readers could taste the original beauty of the Master's mother tongue. Again, he sought the Holy Mother's blessings.

On 4 July 1897 the Holy Mother wrote to M. from Jayrambati: 'My dear child, whatever you heard from the Master was true. You should not feel any fear in publishing them. At one time he left those teachings in your custody, and now he is bringing them to light through you. Know for certain that people's spiritual consciousness will not be awakened without bringing out those

teachings. Whatever words of the Master you collected are true. One day while I was listening to your manuscript, I felt as if the Master was saying all those things.'<sup>9</sup>

With this encouragement from the Holy Mother, M. began to develop *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in earnest. He published chapters from the book in many Bengali magazines and newspapers such as *Udbodhan*, *Tattvamanjari*, *Anusandhan*, *Arati*, *Alochana*, *Utsaha*, *Rishi*, *Janmabhumi*,



*Navya Bharat, Punya, Pradip, Prabasi, Prayas, Bamabodhini, Sahitya, Sahitya Samhita, and Hindu Patrika*.<sup>10</sup> M. then arranged those chapters in chronological order and published them as *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*: Volume 1, which was published on 11 March 1902 by Udbodhan Press under Swami Trigunatitananda's supervision. Volume 2 was published in 1904, Volume 3 in 1908, Volume 4 in 1910, and Volume 5 in 1932. In its entirety, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* contains nearly 177 diary entries that M. recorded during Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime and eight entries that he added after the Master passed away. In addition, M. collected a few entries and a letter from other sources that he included in appendices to those volumes.

Swami Nityatmananda described how M. wrote notes to himself in his diary. On Sunday, 1 January 1882,<sup>11</sup> Sri Ramakrishna went to attend the Brahmo Festival at Jnan Chaudhury's house in Simla, Calcutta. From this information M. wrote only two words in his diary entry for that day: *kamarshalar loha*, meaning 'iron in a smithy'. Prompted by those two words, M. wrote the words of the Master as he remembered them:

Why shouldn't it be possible for a householder to give his mind to God? But the truth is that he no longer has his mind with him. If he had it, then he could certainly offer it to God. But, alas, the mind has been mortgaged—mortgaged to 'woman and gold'. So it is necessary for him constantly to live in the company of holy men. When he gets back his own mind, then he can devote it to spiritual practice; but first it is necessary to live constantly with the guru, wait on him, and enjoy the company of spiritual people. Either he should think of God in solitude day and night, or he should live with holy men. The mind left to itself gradually dries up. Take a jar of water, for instance. If the jar is set aside, the water dries up little by little. But that will not happen if the jar is kept immersed in the Ganges.

The iron becomes red in the furnace of a smithy. Take it out and it becomes black as before. Therefore the iron must be heated in the furnace every now and then.<sup>12</sup>

On 21 February 1924 a devotee asked M.: 'Why did you assume three names—Master, Srīma, Mani—in the *Kathamrita* instead of one?'

M.: 'Where there is a private conversation, I put "Mani"; because it is not necessary for the reader to know the person. It is enough to know what the Master said to him. What is the necessity for others to know whether the Master scolded or praised him?'

The devotee: 'Will readers understand if your diary is printed as it is?'

M.: 'No, people won't understand it. It is recorded in a very concise way. Some parts are in my mind and some are in the diary, such as a subtitle in the chapter, "The Brahmachari and the Snake".'<sup>13</sup>

On 16 July 1925 Swami Vireswarananda asked M. how he could have written the wonderful *Kathamrita* from such meagre sketches. M. humbly replied: 'By the Master's grace alone. People take these incidents to have occurred over forty years ago. But I see them happening this very moment before my very eyes. In meditation the distance of time vanishes. In love and devotion everything is ever-present—there is no past or future.'<sup>14</sup>

On 3 November 1927 a devotee asked M.: 'Is it true that the Master forbade anyone to record

**R**epeat God's name and sing His glories, and keep holy company; and now and then visit God's devotees and holy men. The mind cannot dwell on God if it is immersed day and night in worldliness, in worldly duties and responsibilities; it is most necessary to go into solitude now and then and think of God. To fix the mind on God is very difficult, in the beginning, unless one practises meditation in solitude. —*Gospel*, 81.





*A Fakir Came to Visit Akbar*

his words, except you?' M.: 'The Master did not allow people to record his words in his presence. No one knew that I was recording the Master's sayings. I habitually maintained a diary, so I went on recording his words accordingly. When the Master was ill at the Cossipore garden house, others learned [somehow] that I was recording his conversations, and he did not forbid it.'<sup>15</sup>

M. would listen attentively and become absorbed in the words of the Master, and then return home and write in his diary, sometimes the entire night. On 13 September 1924 M. described the stress this caused: 'One day on Badurbagan Street, in front of Vidyasagar's house, I fell unconscious on the sidewalk. Then someone took me home in a horse carriage. When the Master heard about this incident, he said: "Please sleep more and drink milk. And stop writing for some days."<sup>16</sup>

### ***Sri Ramakrishna's Contribution to M.'s Work***

Sri Ramakrishna's life was based on truth, so every one of his words was true. He said that the Divine Mother had never allowed an untruth

to pass through his lips. The omniscient Master knew that M. was preserving his message, so from time to time he corrected M.'s ideas to make sure they were accurate. The following conversation took place between Sri Ramakrishna and M. on 9 November 1884:

Master (*smiling*): 'How did you like today's conversation?'

M.: 'Very much indeed.'

Master (*smiling*): 'How I spoke about the Emperor Akbar!'

M.: 'It was very good.'

Master: 'Repeat it to me.'

M.: 'A fakir came to visit Akbar. The Emperor was saying his prayers. In his prayers he was asking God to give him wealth and riches. Thereupon the fakir was about to leave the room quietly. Later, when the Emperor asked him about it, the fakir said, "If I must beg, why should I beg of a beggar?"'

Master: 'What else did we talk about?'

M.: 'You told us a great deal about saving up for the future.'

Master (*smiling*): 'What did I say?'

M.: 'As long as a man feels that he must try, he should make an effort. How well you told us about it at Sinthi!'

Master: 'What did I say?'

M.: 'God takes upon Himself complete responsibility for one who totally depends upon Him. It is like a guardian taking charge of a minor. You also told us that at a feast a child cannot by himself find a place to eat his meal; someone finds a place for him.'

Master: 'No, that is not quite to the point. I said that the child doesn't fall if the father leads him and holds his hand.'

M.: 'You also described the three classes of sadhus. The best sadhu does not move about to get his food; he lives in one place and gets his food there. You told us about that young sadhu who said, when he saw the breasts of a young

girl, “Why has she those abscesses?” You told us many other things.’

Master (*smiling*): ‘What else?’

M.: ‘About the crow of Pampa Lake. He repeated the name of Rama day and night. That is why he couldn’t drink the water though he went to its edge. And about the holy man in whose book was written only “Om Rama”. And what Hanuman said to Rama.’

Master: ‘What did he say?’

M.: ‘Hanuman said to Rama: “I saw Sita in Ceylon; but it was only her body. Her mind and soul were lying at Your feet.” ‘And about the chatak bird. He will not drink anything but rain-water. And about jnanayoga and bhaktiyoga.’

Master: ‘What did I say about them?’

M.: ‘As long as one is conscious of the “jar”, the ego will certainly remain. As long as one is conscious of “I”, one cannot get rid of the idea, “I am the devotee and Thou art God”.’

Master: ‘No, it is not that; the “jar” doesn’t disappear whether one is conscious of it or not. One cannot get rid of the “I”. You may reason a thousand times; still it will not go.’

M. remained silent a few moments.

M.: ‘You had that talk with Ishan Mukherji in the Kali temple. We were very lucky to be there.’

Master (*smiling*): ‘Yes, yes. Tell me, what did I say?’

M.: ‘You said that work is only the first step. You told us that you said to Shambhu Mallick, “If God appears before you, will you ask Him for a number of hospitals and dispensaries?” You said another thing: “God does not reveal Himself to a person as long as he is attached to work.” You said that to Keshab Sen.’

Master: ‘What did I say?’

M.: ‘As long as the baby plays with the toy and forgets everything else, its mother looks after her cooking and other household duties; but when the baby throws away the toy and cries, then the mother puts down the rice-pot and comes to the baby.’

‘You said another thing that day: Lakshmana asked Rama where one could find God; after a great deal of explanation, Rama said to him, “Brother, I dwell in the man in whom you find ecstatic love—a love which makes him laugh and weep and dance and sing.”’

Master: ‘Ah me! Ah me!’

Sri Ramakrishna sat in silence a few minutes.

M.: ‘That day you spoke only words of renunciation to Ishan. Since then many of us have come to our senses. Now we are eager to reduce our duties. You said that day, “Ravana died in Ceylon and Behula wept bitterly for him”’

Sri Ramakrishna laughed aloud.

M. (*humbly*): ‘Sir, isn’t it desirable to reduce the number of one’s duties and entanglements?’

Master: ‘Yes. But it is a different thing if you happen to come across a sadhu or a poor man. Then you should serve him.’

M.: ‘And that day you spoke very rightly to Ishan about flatterers. They are like vultures on a carcass. You once said that to Padmalochan also.’

Master: ‘No, to Vamandas of Ulo.’<sup>17</sup>

Sometimes Sri Ramakrishna tested M.’s understanding of specific terms that he used. On 3 August 1884 the Master talked about false and real renunciation. Because M. was a family man, it was not possible for him to renounce completely, so the Master asked him to renounce mentally.

M.: ‘I now desire that my activities may be much reduced and that I may devote myself greatly to God.’

Master: ‘Ah! Certainly your desire will be fulfilled. But a jnani can live unattached in the world.’

**C**ry to the Lord with an intensely yearning heart and you will certainly see Him. People shed a whole jug of tears for wife and children. They swim in tears for money. But who weeps for God? Cry to Him with a real cry.

—Gospel, 83.

M.: ‘True, sir. But one needs special power to lead an unattached life.’

Master: ‘That is also true. But perhaps you wanted the worldly life. ... Now you should pray to God that your worldly duties may be reduced. And you will achieve the goal if you renounce mentally.’

M.: ‘But mental renunciation is prescribed for those who cannot give up the world outwardly. For superior devotees total renunciation is enjoined—both outer and inner.’

Sri Ramakrishna was silent for a few minutes and then resumed the conversation.

Master: ‘How did you like what I said about renunciation a little while ago?’

M.: ‘Very much, sir.’

Master: ‘Tell me, what is the meaning of renunciation?’

M.: ‘Renunciation does not mean simply dispassion for the world. It means dispassion for the world and also longing for God.’

Master: ‘You are right. You no doubt need money for your worldly life; but don’t worry too much about it. ... Those who surrender their hearts and souls to God, those who are devoted to Him and have taken refuge in Him, do not worry much about money. As they earn, so they spend. This is what the Gita describes as “accepting what comes of its own accord” (506).

### ***The Story of M. and His Chronicle***

Every avatar or divine incarnation comes with a chronicler who records the avatar’s life and

*A Leaf from the Diary of M and the Ink Pot in Writing Kathamrita Preserved at M’s House—Kathamrita Bhavan, Kolkata*





teachings. Valmiki wrote Sri Ramachandra's life and teachings in the Ramayana, Vyasa wrote Sri Krishna's life and message in the Bhagavata and the Mahabharata. Buddha's and Christ's lives and messages were recorded by their disciples. According to the divine plan, M. was earmarked to record the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, the avatar of this present age.

Observing Sri Ramakrishna, sometimes twenty-four hours a day for a number of years, M. recorded in the pages of his diary the Master's daily routine, conversations, and way of life. He presented the divine drama of Sri Ramakrishna, showing how an avatar eats and sleeps, talks and behaves, laughs and cries, sings and dances, worships and prays, meditates and goes into samadhi. Such minute details and vivid descriptions of an avatar are unique in religious history. For his contributions, M. deserves not only respect and appreciation, but also humanity's adoration.

Once a famous writer expressed his doubt about the authenticity of the *Kathamrita* to me: 'How is it possible to write five volumes of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* [*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* consists of 1063 pages] based on a diary? How can M. develop long conversations, songs, stories so elaborately and vividly after many years? It seems to me that some words belong to Sri Ramakrishna and some M. supplied in the gospel.'

I answered: 'Well, do you have any doubt about the Gita, Bhagavata, Ramayana? When Krishna was teaching the Gita to Arjuna, Vyasa was not there. Ugrasrava Sauti was present when Shukadeva narrated 18,000 verses of the Bhagavata to Parikshit and later he recited them to the rishis at Naimisharanya from his memory. Valmiki wrote Ramayana without becoming an eyewitness of Rama's life. No Hindus have any doubt about the Gita, Bhagavata, and Ramayana. Regarding the Bible, Matthew recorded Christ's

life and teachings in Hebrew after thirty years of his passing away. Mark recorded the story from Peter and Luke's recording came from Paul. John emphasised Christ's philosophy and message rather than his life. No Christians doubt the Bible. Muhammad recited the Allah's message as told by Angel Gabriel and thus the Koran was recorded. No Muslims doubt the Koran.' Anyhow, I tried to remove the doubt of the writer.

As the rishis of the Vedic age discovered the truth of the Upanishads, so M. practised truth wholeheartedly so that he could establish the *Kathamrita* on truth. He acted like the sage Vyasa in Sri Ramakrishna incarnation. It is true that without divine grace no human being can write the *Kathamrita*. During M.'s second visit the Master smashed his ego and possessed him, so that he could perform the job of a chronicler. The Master also empowered him, saying this prayer: 'Mother, I cannot speak any more. Please give some power to Ram, Mahendra (M.), Vijay and others. Let them now work for you.'<sup>18</sup>

On 22 July 1883 the Master was talking with the Divine Mother in an ecstatic mood: 'O Mother, why hast Thou given him [M.] only a particle?' Remaining silent a few moments, he added: 'I understand it, Mother. That little bit will be enough for him and will serve Thy purpose. That little bit will enable him to teach people.'<sup>19</sup>

On 6 February 1919 a devotee asked M.: 'When did you write the *Kathamrita*? Did you write at night after working all day? It must

**G**od undoubtedly dwells in the hearts of all— holy and unholy, righteous and unrighteous; but a man should not have dealings with the unholy, the wicked, the impure. He must not be intimate with them. With some of them he may exchange words, but with others he shouldn't go even that far. He should keep aloof from such people. —*Gospel*, 85.

have been exhausting.' M. replied: 'Is it possible to achieve anything without hard labour? Yes, I used to write at night. Sometimes I listened to the Master's conversation and then wrote it down in my diary the next day after meditation.' Then he opened a page from the *Chandi* and recited: "O Devi, you are the intelligence by which the essence of all scriptures is comprehended."<sup>20</sup> Have I done this work? It was the Master's work; he did it. He appeared in me as *medha* [the power of remembrance]. He is the doer and makes others act. We may or may not realize this."<sup>21</sup> 'What a wonderful thing the Master produced! Such a thing does not exist for other avatars. The *Kathamrita* is like a photograph, an exact reproduction. It depicts the

place, time, *tithi* or lunar day, even the high and low tides of the Ganges. If someone reads this book after visiting Dakshineswar, he or she will experience deep meditation' (469).

On different occasions M. later related the genesis or the birth story of the *Gospel* to the monks and devotees:

Once the Master said to me: 'The Divine Mother has told me that you have to do a little work for her. You will have to teach the Bhagavata, the word of God, to humanity. God binds the Bhagavata pandit to the world with one tie; otherwise, who would remain to explain the sacred book? He keeps the pandit bound for the good of men. That is why the Divine Mother has kept you in the world.'

*The Cot Used by M. in His Room in Kathamrita Bhavan*



To what extent can we foresee God's plan? The Master made me start keeping a diary in 1867 when I was a student of class eight at Hare School. Since then I recorded in my journal my daily activities, the places I had visited, and so on. I met the Master in the later part of February 1882. That is when my habit of maintaining a diary really became fruitful. When we look back on our past we realize that God is making us do everything. God determines beforehand what he will do through a particular person and then gets it done through him. There were many people around the Master, but he made me write the chronicle. As a result, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* came into existence. I was an apprentice for fifteen years. The hard discipline greatly helped me. It sharpened my memory and increased my skill in writing. I could recall the sequence of all of the incidents that had occurred during the day after I returned home at night. I would try to remember the first lines of the songs I had heard. This is the way the Master worked through me.

I was involved in worldly activities, bound to my work, and could not visit the Master whenever I wished. Therefore I used to note down his words so that I could think over what he had said between my visits to him. In this way the impressions made on my mind might not be counteracted by the stress of worldly work and responsibilities. It was thus for my own benefit that I first took notes, so that I might realize his teachings more perfectly.

I used to memorize the Master's words, and then after returning home I would write brief notes in my diary. Sometimes I would spend the whole night in completing my record. Later I would fill in all the details from memory. Sometimes I would spend seven days completing the record of one day's happenings. Thus *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* appeared in book form from the notes of my diary. Sometimes I had to wait for a word of the Master's to come to my mind as a chataka bird waits for a drop of rainwater to fall. Sometimes I meditated on

one scene over a thousand times. As a result I could vividly visualize the Master's divine play, though it had happened long before. By the grace of the Master I used to feel that his play had just happened. Therefore one can say that it was written in the Master's presence. At times I would not be satisfied with a particular description of an episode, so I would get absorbed in meditation on the Master. Then the correct picture would vividly appear in my mind. Therefore, from a human standpoint there was a great distance of time, but in my thought world I felt that it had happened just before I recorded it. My account is not culled from other sources. I recorded whatever I heard from the Master's lips with my own ears and whatever I saw of his life with my own eyes. ...

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is the world's only firsthand record of the life and teachings of an avatar. One can collect materials about Sri Ramakrishna in three ways: First, direct observation recorded on the same day; second, direct observation but unrecorded during the lifetime of the Master; and third, hearsay, also unrecorded during the lifetime of the Master. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* belongs to the first category. I was present during each scene of the *Gospel*.

I have published my diary very carefully. If there is any mistake in it, then its value will diminish. People do not realize that at one time I had to study the rules of evidence. If a witness makes a single mistake, the entire case becomes nullified. Addressing the judge, the lawyer says, 'My Lord, this witness is not reliable.' I used to visit the court and observe all these details. The evidence of an eyewitness is very valuable. For that reason the judge asks, 'Did you see this yourself?' If a person

**S**o you must hiss at wicked people. You must frighten them lest they should do you harm. But never inject your venom into them. One must not injure others.

—*Gospel*, 86.



has seen and heard something himself, his words carry weight. I checked all the facts and details before I published the *Gospel*.<sup>22</sup>

When somebody asked M. to remove some of the repetitions from the *Gospel*, he replied:

I cannot do that. The Master told the same parable to different people. If I remove a particular section, the train of the conversation will be broken. Moreover, you won't be able to see the effect of the *Gospel* on a particular person's life. The Master gave the same teaching to five different people in five different places. What he said to Bankim, he said to others also; and whatever conversation he had with Vivekananda, he had with others too.

You see, sometimes the brilliance of a diamond is enhanced by changing its setting. Putting it on the dusty ground produces one effect, and putting it on a green lawn produces another. But putting it in a casket lined with blue

velvet produces the most brilliant effect of all. The same is true of the words in the *Gospel*. The rays of the sun look different when they fall on water, on the earth, and on glass, but the maximum brilliance is produced when the sun is reflected on glass. So I cannot avoid the repetitions in the *Gospel*, because removing them would disturb the Master's dialogue.

Once Hriday said to the Master: 'Uncle, please reserve some of your best teachings. Otherwise, if you say everything all at once, and then repeat the same thing again and again, people will not come to you anymore.' The Master replied: 'You rascal! I shall repeat my words fifty times. What does it matter to you?' (ibid.)

M. added the *Kathamrita* to the curriculum of his school. When M. was accused by some people of trying to sell his books to the students, he calmly replied:

The students will understand the effect of reading the *Gospel* when they enter family life. The Master used to say, 'The world is a burning fire.' And I fully realized it. After the boys enter the world and are tormented by sorrows and sufferings, the Master's immortal words will save them, like a loving mother. If they remember at least one of the Master's teachings, that will be like a boat to ferry them across the turbulent ocean of maya and it will bring peace to their lives (ibid.).

In spite of illness, M. read the proofs of the last part of the *Kathamrita* at one o'clock in the morning by the light of a kerosene lantern. When lovingly chastised by Swami Nityatmananda, he said:

People are finding peace by reading this book, the Master's immortal message. It is inevitable that the body will meet its end, so it is better that it be used for spreading peace to others. We are in the world and have fully experienced how much pain there is in it, yet I have forgotten that pain through *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. I am hurrying so that the book may come out soon (ibid.).

The Stairs Leading to M.'s Room in Kathamrita Bhavan



### Sri Ramakrishna's Language in the Kathamrita

The teachings of Buddha and Christ spread quickly among the masses because they spoke in the language of the people. Buddha used Pali, while Christ taught in Aramaic. Language is the carrier of ideas, and those great teachers explained their ideas through tales and parables that were very effective. Even people who had no formal education could understand their message.

The tenth chapter of the *Lalita-vistara* describes Prince Siddhartha's education under Vishwamitra. Siddhartha, later Buddha, learned 64 *lipis*—that is, dialects or languages, such as Anga lipi, Banga lipi, Magadh lipi, Shakari lipi, Dravir lipi, Chin lipi, Brahmavali lipi, and so on. He also studied the Vedas in Sanskrit.

*Halley's Bible Handbook* describes Christ's use of language: 'Aramaic was the common language of the people. This was the language Jesus used. He was instructed in Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament Scriptures. He must have known Greek, for it was the language of a large part of the population, and the universal language of the time. Jesus was familiar with both the Hebrew and Septuagint Old Testament. His own language is superb.'<sup>23</sup> Before his crucifixion Jesus talked to Pilate, who was a Roman ruler, which indicates he might have known Latin.

Like Buddha and Christ, Sri Ramakrishna taught in the language of the people. His mother tongue was Bengali, but he also knew some English words, including *friend*, *refine*, *like*, *honorary*, *society*, *under*, *tax*, *cheque*, and *thank you*. Although he had no formal education, he could read and write Bengali. Once he humorously said: 'Narendra considers me to be illiterate, but I know the alphabet.' He copied some scriptures by hand, and these copies are now in the Belur Math archives. Sri Ramakrishna spoke Hindi with his guru Tota Puri and with monks from



Swami Nityatmananda (1893–1975)

western India. He studied Sanskrit 'a little' at his brother's Sanskrit School in Calcutta. He once said: 'If a pundit speaks to me in Sanskrit I can follow him, but I cannot speak it myself.'<sup>24</sup>

Before we discuss the charm of Sri Ramakrishna's language and how M. recorded it almost verbatim in the *Kathamrita*, it is important to understand the difference between the colloquial mother tongue and literary language. Children learn their mother tongue spontaneously from their parents, friends, and relatives, but they learn literary language from teachers in school.

As a child Sri Ramakrishna learnt his native mother tongue, which was Bengali, but he never

The gist of the whole thing is that one must develop passionate yearning for God and practise discrimination and renunciation.

—Gospel, 183.

learnt literary language or 'language proper,' from his schooling. Thus, when we read the *Kathamrita*, we enjoy the freshness and liveliness of Sri Ramakrishna's colloquial village language. His language is simple and sweet; his words are clear and charming; his examples are apt and beautiful; his descriptions are poetic and graphic; his ideas are profound and meaningful; his style of conversation is original and captivating; his gestures and mimicry are joyful and entertaining. Sri Ramakrishna used short and simple sentences to communicate his profound teachings, so his powerful statements would remain in the minds of his listeners. Even the great savants of India sat spellbound, listening to this uneducated temple priest.

On 28 March 1875, *The Indian Mirror* wrote about Sri Ramakrishna: 'We met one (a sincere Hindu devotee) not long ago and were charmed by the depth, penetration, and simplicity of his spirit. The never-ceasing metaphors

and analogies, in which he indulged, are most of them as apt as they are beautiful.'<sup>25</sup> On 19 August 1886 *The Indian Mirror* wrote again: 'He [Sri Ramakrishna] was an unlettered man, but his commonsense was strong and his power of observation keen. He had [a] facility for expressing his ideas in such homely language that he could make himself easily understood by all on intricate points of religion and morality. His childlike simplicity and outspokenness, his deep religious fervour and self-denial, his genial and sympathetic nature and his meek and unassuming manners won the hearts of those who came in contact with him, and music from his lips had a peculiar charm on those who heard him sing' (46-7).

Swamiji said: 'My ideal of language is my Master's language, most colloquial and yet most expressive. It must express the thought which is intended to be conveyed.'<sup>26</sup>

When flowers bloom, bees come of their own

*Originals Photographs of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother in M.' Room*





accord. In New York Swamiji gave a lecture entitled 'My Master' in which he said:

People came by thousands to see this wonderful man who spoke in a patois, every word of which was forceful and instinct with light. For it is not what is spoken, much less the language in which it is spoken, but it is the personality of the speaker which dwells in everything he says that carries weight. Every one of us feels this at times. We hear most splendid orations, most wonderfully reasoned-out discourses, and we go home and forget them all. At other times we hear a few words in the simplest of language, and they enter into our lives, become part and parcel of ourselves and produce lasting results. The words of a man who can put his personality into them take effect, but he must have tremendous personality. All teaching implies giving and taking, the teacher gives and the taught receives, but the one must have something to give, and the other must be open to receive (4.178).

It is true that Sri Ramakrishna did not have much formal education, but his words had the force of scripture and he spoke only truth. Swamiji later said: 'The Vedas and other scriptures were so long hidden in the darkness of ignorance, and the light of Sri Ramakrishna has revealed them again.'<sup>27</sup> While in America, Swamiji reminisced to his disciples: 'When I think of that man [Sri Ramakrishna], I feel like a fool, because I want to read books and he never did. He never wanted to lick the plates after other people had eaten. That is why he was his own book.'<sup>28</sup>

Observing the Master's encyclopaedic knowledge of religion and philosophy, a disciple asked him how he came to have such deep and broad knowledge.

Sri Ramakrishna answered: 'I have not read; I have listened and learned. I have made a garland of their knowledge and put it round my neck, and I have offered it at the feet of the Mother.'<sup>29</sup>

On 2 January 1884 Sri Ramakrishna said to M.: 'At Kamarpukur I have seen grain-dealers measuring paddy. As one heap is measured away another heap is pushed forward to be measured. The Mother supplies the devotees with the "heap" of Knowledge. ... Weeping, I prayed to the Mother: "O Mother, reveal to me what is contained in the Vedas and the Vedanta. Reveal to me what is in the Purana and the Tantra." One by one She has revealed all these to me.'<sup>30</sup> Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the Divine Mother spoke through his mouth.

M. was blessed with the opportunity to record Sri Ramakrishna's divine language in the pages of the *Kathamrita*. He did not vitiate that wonderful language by paraphrasing it or rewriting the Master's words. Like a skilled craftsman, M. set those divine jewels of the Master's words in the pages of the *Kathamrita*. He re-created Sri Ramakrishna's speech by reviewing his diary entries and notes, and meditating upon them. I had the opportunity to see some pages of M.'s diary—and from those I could understand that without divine grace, no one could have accurately recorded those divine dialogues with Sri Ramakrishna.

M. emphatically said: 'Every word of the Master is a mantra.' By this he meant that reflecting upon those words connects individual souls with God. Here I present some of the Master's words as M. recorded them in the *Kathamrita*.

- *Manav jivaner uddeshya ishvarlabh*: The

Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Kali, the Divine Mother of the Universe. He said: 'Mother, everyone says, "My watch alone is right." The Christians, the Brahmos, the Hindus, the Mussalmans, all say, "My religion alone is true." But, Mother, the fact is that nobody's watch is right. Who can truly understand Thee? But if a man prays to Thee with a yearning heart, he can reach Thee, through Thy grace, by any path.' —*Gospel*, 93.

goal of human life is to realise God.

- *Kamini kanchan maya*: Lust and greed are maya.
- *Satya-katha kalir tapasya*: Practising truthfulness is the austerity in this Kaliyuga.
- *Bhagavata-bhakta-bhagavan—tine ek*: The scripture, the devotee, and God—are all one.
- *Ami mole ghuchibe janjal*: All troubles will cease when the 'I' dies.
- *Ami jantra tumi jantri*: I am the instrument and you are the operator.
- *Naham naham, tuhun tuhun*: Not I, not I, but thou, thou.
- *Yato mat tato path*: As many faiths, so many paths.
- *Advaita-jnan anchale bendhe ja ichha tai karo*: Tie nondual knowledge in the corner of your cloth and then do whatever you like.
- *Bhakta hobi to boka hobi keno*: Be a devotee, but don't be foolish.
- *Ishvar Kalpataru*: God is the wish-fulfilling tree.

Five Volumes of the Kathamrita Originally Published by M.



- *Brahma ar shakti abhed*: Brahman and its power are identical.
- *Vedanter sar—brahma satya jagat mithya*: The essence of Vedanta is: Brahman is real and the world is impermanent.
- *Gitar sar—tyagi tyagi*: The essence of the Gita is this: Renounce, renounce.
- *Bishay-asakta mon bhije deshlai*: The attached mind is like a box of wet matches.
- *Nirakaro satya avar sakaro satya*: God without form and with form—both are true.
- *Jemon bhav temni labh*: As is a person's feeling of love, so is one's gain.
- *Dhyan korbe mone, bone, o kone*: Meditate in your mind, in the forest, or in the corner of your room.
- *Dub dao*: Dive deep.
- *Satchidanandai guru*: Satchidananda alone is the guru.
- *Ishvarke tushta koro, sakalai thushta hobe*: Please God, then everyone will be pleased.
- *Tini sab hoyechen tabe manushai tini beshi prakash*: God has become everything, but he is manifested to the utmost in human beings.
- *Ishvarer iti korata hina buddhi*: It is petty to limit God.
- *Mon mukh ek korai dharma*: True religion is the union of the mind and speech.
- *Bhaver ghare churi koro na*: Let there be no theft [hypocrisy] in the chamber of your heart, that is, shun hypocrisy.

### Translating Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita

M. wrote his first drafts of the *Kathamrita* in Bengali so that he could read them to the Holy Mother. In 1888 he expanded four entries from his diary: (1) 15 June 1884, Surendra's Garden, Calcutta; (2) 25 June 1884, visit to a Hindu Pandit and Preacher (Shashadhar), Calcutta; (3) 5 August 1882, Visit to Pandit

Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Calcutta, (4) 3 August 1884, Dakshineswar Thakurbari. M. then translated these entries into English under the heading *Leaves from the Gospel of the Lord Sree Ramakrishna*, and they were published serially in *Brahmavadin* magazine—which was started by Swamiji in 1895—on 15 October 1897, 16 November 1897, 1 February 1898, and 16 May 1898. He wrote these articles under his pen name: ‘According to M., a Son of the Lord and Servant’. He also added a footnote below the title: ‘Translated by M. from original records kept in Bengali by M. These records are based on notes put down by M. on the very day of the meeting, shortly after the meeting was over and purport to be an attempt to give the *Lords* [sic] *own words* as far as possible.’<sup>31</sup> Later these four entries were published in two pamphlets in English.

Enthusiastic readers were not satisfied with these pamphlets and demanded that the entire *Gospel* be published in book form. M. worked diligently to develop his diary entries, writing first in Bengali and then translating them into English. In 1907 M. took the four chapters from the *Brahmavadin*, added ten more chapters, and produced a book entitled ‘The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (According to M., a son of the Lord and disciple)’. M. added a subtitle: ‘or The Ideal Man for India and for the World.’ This publication, part one of the *Gospel*, was published by the Brahmvadin Office, Madras. It consists of 386 pages. In its second edition, M. deleted the subtitle. Of this *Gospel*, M. wrote: ‘It is no sentence by sentence translation but M.’s own rendering of his thoughts rather than language, directly into English with many elaborations and elucidating repetitions.’<sup>32</sup> In 1912 Swami Trigunatitananda of the Vedanta Society of San Francisco published this first edition of the *Gospel*.

The English of the first edition was archaic, a kind of evangelical language: Thou thinketh,

thou comest, thou askest, thou art, and so on. When M. made revisions for the second edition, he freed it of its biblical turns of expression. This edition was published in 1911 by Ramakrishna Math, Madras. The Madras Math published several more editions, and this work was in circulation until 1942, when the complete translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which contained all five volumes of the original *Kathamrita*, by Swami Nikhilananda came out. In 1978 the Madras Math reprinted M.’s version under the title *The Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

In 1907 Swami Abhedananda of the Vedanta Society of New York published another version, the *Gospel of Ramakrishna*. In the preface, Swami Abhedananda wrote:

This is the authorized English edition of the *Gospel of Ramakrishna*. For the first time in the history of the world’s Great Saviours, the exact words of the Master were recorded verbatim by one of his devoted disciples. These words were originally spoken in the Bengali language of India. They were taken down in the form of diary notes by a householder disciple, M.

M. wrote to me letters authorizing me to edit and publish the English translation of his notes, and sent me the manuscript in English which he himself translated. At the request of M., I have edited and remodeled the larger portion of his English manuscript, while the remaining portions I have translated directly from the Bengali edition of his notes.<sup>33</sup>

Although Swami Abhedananda’s edited version of the *Gospel* received many favourable reviews from US papers and was translated into

**G**od and His glory. This universe is His glory. People see His glory and forget everything. They do not seek God, whose glory is this world. All seek to enjoy ‘woman and gold’. But there is too much misery and worry in that.

—*Gospel*, 96.



Spanish, Portuguese, Danish, Scandinavian, and Czech, it lacks the flavour and style of M.'s original. M. later remarked that Swami Abhedananda had added his own reminiscences to the book.<sup>34</sup> In 1939 Ramakrishna Vedanta Math re-published this book as *The Memoirs of Ramakrishna*. In 1947 the Vedanta Society of New York reprinted this book with a foreword by Christopher Isherwood.

In 1922, Ramakrishna Math, Madras, published an English translation of Volume 2 of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, without consulting M., who was still alive. The material of this volume first came out serially in *Vedanta Kesari*. M. disapproved of this and asked Swami Shivananda, the president of the Ramakrishna Order, to stop the publication. *Vedanta Kesari* discontinued the series, but the Madras Math published this material as Volume 2 of the *Gospel*. This volume was edited by a Westerner, and

the second edition was published in 1928. Then it was withdrawn as it did not meet M.'s approval.

Regarding this volume two, M. commented:

Even a student of eighth grade translates from Bengali into English. Translation is not an easy thing. One should transmit the idea and mood. A literal translation is not enough. Western people do not understand the Bengali language. ... While talking, the Master would express an idea with a living feeling. In my translation I have tried my best to convey the same spirit by preserving his words as far as possible. The primary importance is the sense or meaning; words or the language are only secondary. And I have tried to express it in a simple language. In translation, the meaning changes if one overlooks the viewpoint of the Master's saying.<sup>35</sup>

M. was very particular about his record of the Master's words. It was extremely painful for him if his work was translated in a distorted form. Swami Avyaktananda began to publish the trans-

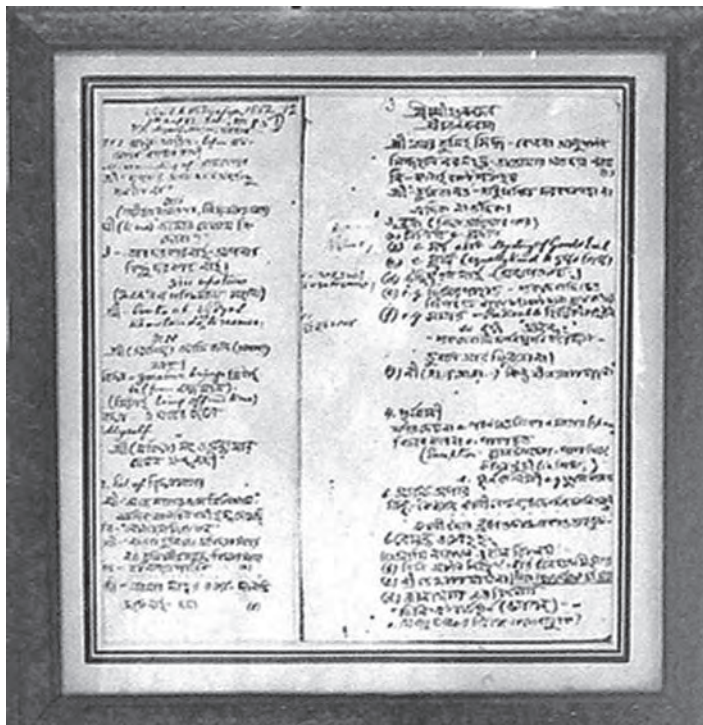
lation of other volumes of *Kathamrita* in *Morning Star*, a magazine in Patna.

On 17 May 1930 M. wrote to him:

Dear Avyakta Babaji, My love and salutations to you all. The translation of the *Gospel* in the *Morning Star*, is, I regret to say, not satisfactory to me. Being an eyewitness, I naturally want the spirit to be kept up in the translation. Moreover, the report of a meeting should not appear in a mutilated form. The translation should be done by myself. You may do the work after my passing, which is by no means a distant contingency. I am 76 and my health is not at all good. It is painful to see the *Gospel* presented in this way. I do not approve the translation which has appeared as Volume 2 from Madras. —'M'.<sup>36</sup>

In 1942 Swami Nikhilananda of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda

A Leaf from the Diary of M., Kept in his Room



Centre, New York, translated all five volumes of M.'s *Kathamrita* into English and published the work in one chronologically arranged volume. He did not translate the entire *Kathamrita*. As he writes in the preface: 'I have made a literal translation, omitting only a few pages of no particular interest to English-speaking readers.' He wrote a long biographical introduction on Sri Ramakrishna, replacing the sketch that M. had written. On the whole, Swami Nikhilananda's translation is superb and elegant. His manuscript was edited by Margaret Woodrow Wilson—a daughter of President Woodrow Wilson—and Joseph Campbell—a famous scholar and orientalist. John Moffitt, Jr—a poet and scholar—used his poetical talent on the mystical and spiritual songs of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which enhanced their beauty. Aldous Huxley wrote the foreword to this work. This translation drew the attention of the literary world of the East and the West. Dr S Radhakrishnan wrote: 'Swami Nikhilananda has done an excellent piece of work. His very readable English translation of the *Ramakrishna-Kathamrita* will enable Western readers to understand the deep spiritual life of Sri Ramakrishna and the homely way in which profound truths are conveyed to ordinary mortals, and I hope that the book will have wide publicity.'<sup>37</sup>

M.'s Bengali *Kathamrita* has been translated into the following Indian languages: Sanskrit, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, and some selected portions in Sindhi, Punjabi, Urdu and Khasi. Swami Nikhilananda's translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* has been translated into German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Swedish, Portuguese, Chinese (Mandarin), Bulgarian, Polish, Serbo-Croatian (Yugoslavian), Greek, and Hebrew. There may be more translations in Japanese and French.

### M.'s Diary: Lost and Found

Now and then M. would visit Gadadhar Ashrama, a branch of the Ramakrishna Order, in South Calcutta, as he loved to stay with the monks in the monastery. Wherever he went, he carried his diary, which reminded him of the Master. Sometimes he would open it to an entry, meditate on a particular scene, and then talk about it to the monks and devotees. On 16 January 1924 M. was returning by tram from Gadadhar Ashrama to his home in Central Calcutta. Absorbed in thoughts of the Master, he accidentally left his diary next to his seat while changing trams at the Esplanade Station. The diary was found two days later.

On 18 January M. described his agony to the devotees:

What terrible distress I have gone through! It was worse than losing a son. I felt I should not live anymore; otherwise why had the Master taken away his words from me? When I got back my diary, I realized that this body would remain a few days more. Last Tuesday while returning from Gadadhar Ashrama, I left my diary in the tram car. It struck me when I returned home. It was then 11:00 a.m. Immediately I rushed to the Kali temple of Thanthania. I had visited the Divine Mother after getting down from the tram. I thought that I had left the diary there. Some pandits were reading the holy scriptures in front of the temple. I asked

There is another benefit from holy company. It helps one cultivate discrimination between the Real and the unreal. God alone is the Real, that is to say, the Eternal Substance, and the world is unreal, that is to say, transitory. As soon as a man finds his mind wandering away to the unreal, he should apply discrimination. The moment an elephant stretches out its trunk to eat a plaintain-tree in a neighbour's garden, it gets a blow from the iron goad of the driver —*Gospel*, 97.

them but no one gave me a positive answer. Then I tried to locate my tram ticket, which I had torn and discarded on the sidewalk. It took me 45 minutes to collect those pieces of the ticket and then bring them home. I pasted them on a piece of paper with flour gum and discovered the number of the ticket.

Immediately I went to the Gadadhar Ashrama. In the afternoon the devotees took the ticket and went to the Kalighat tram depot. They discovered the name of the conductor who was on that tram. On Wednesday morning news came that the diary had been found. The conductor had deposited it with the overseer of the tram depot. This overseer was a devotee. He saw the name 'Jayrambati' on the cover of the diary, so he carefully saved it.

In the evening I fervently prayed to the Master. My fear did not go away even after I learned that the diary had been found. I was worried that it might be lost again before picking it up. Oh, how much fear and anxiety I went through for that diary! How sincerely I prayed to the Master for that! What joy I felt when it came to my hand!

Again, another thought arose in my mind: It is not a big deal. I left the diary in the tram car and the conductor deposited it in the office. That is the normal procedure. After receiving the diary, I felt that it had not been necessary to say so many prayers. Such are the vagaries of our minds! It behaved in quite another way once the diary was retrieved. You see, many things could have happened: There could have been a tram accident, or someone could have been run over, or the conductor might not have taken proper care of it.

A Devotee: 'It also might have fallen into the hands of the sweeper of the car.'

M.: 'Yes, it could have been, or someone could have taken it and thrown it away on the street. But as soon as I got the diary back, I forgot all those possibilities. What irony! And we live with this mind, which plays tricks on us all the time. So we should always pray: May we not

deviate from our goal. May we not forget God when something has been accomplished.'

M. presented a copy of the *Kathamrita* to the overseer as a token of his gratefulness.<sup>38</sup>

### **An Interview with M. at Morton School on 20 March 1924**

Swami Madhavananda, the president of Advaita Ashrama in Mayavati, was working on a biography of Sri Ramakrishna. He found some discrepancies between the *Kathamrita* by M. and the *Lilaprasanga* by Swami Saradananda, so he went to M. to verify those facts. Furthermore, he wanted to ask M. how he had recorded the *Kathamrita* and gathered some other information about the Master.

Swami Madhavananda (*to M.*): 'How many times did Sri Ramakrishna go on pilgrimage? You have mentioned two times.'

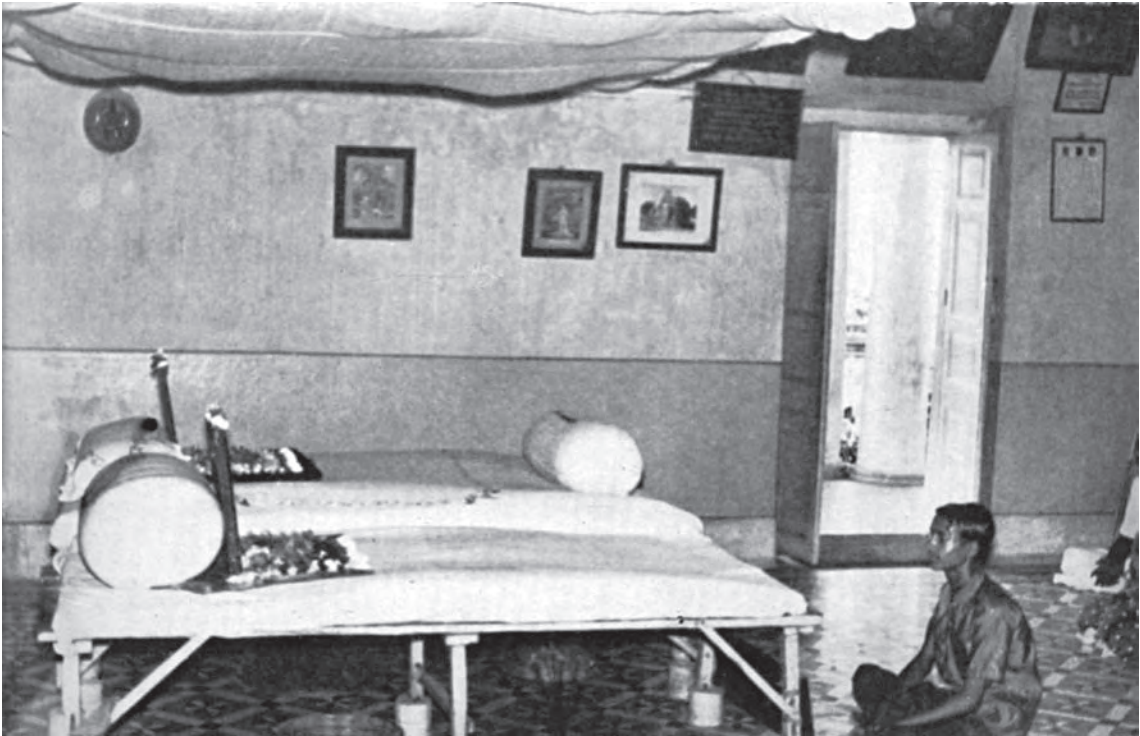
M.: 'Yes, twice. First, the Master went with Mathur; then he went with Mathur's sons. At that time one could go to Varanasi by train. I corresponded with the Railway Company with reference and compared its record of the dates and of who went with him, and they were the same. Moreover, there is some circumstantial evidence. I visited Janbazar and Barrackpore and collected information from the descendants of Rani Rasmani.'

Swami Madhavananda: 'Did you write in your diary immediately after listening to the Master?'

M.: 'No, I didn't write on the spot. After I returned home I wrote from memory. Sometimes I spent the whole night completing an entry. My record [*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*] is not a collection from other sources. I wrote down whatever I heard with my own ears from the lips of the Master and whatever I saw of his life with my own eyes. I didn't collect materials like historians or write like the antiquarians.'

Swami Madhavananda: 'It is amazing that within such a short period there are so many





Inside of Sri Ramakrishna's Room at Dakshineswar

different versions of the Master's life and teachings!'

M.: 'This is nothing to wonder at. It happens that way. Look at the Bible: there is little similarity among the four gospels recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The same thing will happen in the case of the Master. Sometimes I spent seven days recording from memory the events of one day—arranging chronologically the songs, stories, samadhi, and so on.'

Swami Madhavananda: 'To whom did the Master offer the articles during the night of Kali Puja at Shyampukur house?'

M.: 'He offered them to himself.'

Swami Madhavananda: 'Did he offer them to himself or to Mother Kali?'

M.: 'In fact, he offered them to himself. As soon as all of the devotees had offered flowers to the Master, his hands assumed the gestures symbolizing fearlessness and the bestowal of boons

[that are seen in images of Kali]. Thus—(saying so, M. demonstrated those two gestures with his own hands). Then everyone realized who the Master was.'

Swami Madhavananda: 'What do you know about the name 'Ramakrishna'?''

M.: 'I didn't hear anything from the Master about his name. Probably "Ramakrishna" was the name given by his family, because the prefix of his brothers' names was "Rama" (such as Ramkumar and Rameswar). They were all devotees of Ramachandra, and Raghuvir was their household deity. The village people called him "Gadai". We did not know that he was called Gadadhar. We learned it later. Tota Puri didn't give him the name "Ramakrishna", because long before Tota Puri arrived

**S**in begets its own result. This is God's law. Won't you burn your tongue if you chew a chilli? In his youth Mathur led a rather fast life; so he suffered from various diseases before his death. —*Gospel*, 97.



M.: 'I want to do that. The *Basumati* publishing house sent a person to me. They are eager to publish it.'

Senior Jiten: 'Swami Madhavananda and others are writing a biography of the Master.'

M.: 'Who else will write it? They have practised so much austerity and lived with the disciples of the Master. Moreover they live in the Himalayas [Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati].

M. continued: 'Mayavati Ashrama is doing a marvellous job. It has published many important books. The monks are doing unselfish action, without any personal motive.'

Swami Madhavananda left after having some refreshments.<sup>42</sup>

### Characteristics of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

M. had a photographic memory, artistic talent, and, above all, a poetic imagination. Though one can challenge the historicity of Christ, Buddha, or Krishna, one cannot challenge the existence of Sri Ramakrishna. M. meticulously documented his conversations with the Master, carefully noting the dates and times, the places, and the people who were present, and even any songs that were sung.

Did Sri Ramakrishna say anything new? Not really. He reinterpreted the same ancient truth. He said, 'A coin of the time of the Nawabs [a Muslim king] is not legal tender during the period of the Badshas [Muslim emperor].'<sup>43</sup> The coins change according to the rule of different dynasties. Similarly, the ancient avatars brought the message that was needed for their particular age and the conditions in which they lived. Now a new avatar has preached according to the need of our age. One hundred years ago people did not know much about modern medicine. They treated their diseases with herbs and natural medicines. Now we use antibiotics. Herbs

and antibiotics are both medicines, but their use changes with the times. Krishna said in the Gita, 'Arjuna, I am speaking to you the same truth again.'<sup>44</sup> Tautology is a weakness in logic, but it is not a weak point in scripture. The scriptures never tire of declaring the same truth again and again in different languages in different ages.

In the *Gospel* we find that M. not only preserved the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, but also described the settings in order to make a deeper impression on the reader's mind. Here is an example of a description from the *Gospel*, dated 22 July 1883:

Sri Ramakrishna had enjoyed a little rest after his midday meal. The room had an atmosphere of purity and holiness. On the walls hung pictures of gods and goddesses, among them being one of Christ rescuing the drowning Peter. Outside the room were plants laden with fragrant flowers, and the Ganges could be seen flowing towards the south. It was the rainy season; the exuberant Ganges was hurrying to meet the ocean and was happy to touch and to see the holy ground where the great saint of Dakshineswar resided.<sup>45</sup>

Here, M. was comparing the spiritual seekers who were coming to meet Sri Ramakrishna to rivers merging in the infinite ocean of Satchidananda.

Swami Ritajananda once wrote:

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* begins like a novel with a little bit of description of the surroundings in picturesque language, so that

Anyone and everyone cannot be a guru. A huge timber floats on the water and can carry animals as well. But a piece of worthless wood sinks, if a man sits on it, and drowns him. Therefore in every age God incarnates Himself as the guru, to teach humanity. Satchidananda alone is the guru. —*Gospel*, 98.



the reader can visualize everything around the Master: the large property of the Dakshineswar temple with its gardens, tanks, temples, etc. If anyone desires to make a film, he will find all the directions necessary in the masterly descriptions one reads in the *Gospel*. The place and times, the people present, the positions they took in the room where they met, the songs, and finally every movement of Sri Ramakrishna—these are all presented so vividly that it becomes a special attraction. We have no such presentation of anyone else's life.

In the *Gospel* we find plenty of information about Sri Ramakrishna and how he lived in the world. With him there was plenty of laughter,

*An Old Picture of the Platform at Sri M.'s House where Sri M. and other Disciples of the Master Sat and Meditated.*



and it was really fortunate for so many to be near him and feel that the world is really a mansion of mirth in spite of their many painful experiences. Sri Ramakrishna also talked of suffering, the suffering of others and even his own. His health was not perfect and he eventually got cancer of the throat which entailed extreme physical pain. Many who were dear to him left this world, and those who lived with him were not always kind and respectful. Yet he was above all these things. The Divine Mother was constantly near Her beloved son, answering his questions. M. ignored nothing that took place in the small room of Sri Ramakrishna. He tells us how Sri Ramakrishna ate, how he spoke, how he imitated people and amused the youngsters. Never trying to idolize Sri Ramakrishna, never judging his actions or his words, M. presents a picture of his Master in the most natural way possible. This makes us understand that a highly evolved spiritual person can also be a human being.<sup>46</sup>

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is an authentic record of Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings. M. testified that whatever he saw and heard from the Master on that particular day, he recorded on the same day or night in his diary, including year, month, date, day, and *tithi*—lunar day.

Sri Ramakrishna's teachings are profound and yet very simple and appealing. Moreover, his language and the expressions he used are

*A Recent Picture of the same Platform*



fascinating. Many people learn Bengali so that they can read this wonderful piece of literature in its original form and get a taste of how Sri Ramakrishna actually spoke.

When we read the *Gospel*, its vivid descriptions help us visualise Sri Ramakrishna as he moved through his environment. We see the places he saw and the people he came in contact with. This vivid and artistic depiction of an avatar's life is unique. As we read the *Gospel*, we enjoy the holy company of the Master. In the *Gospel*, festivities are always going on, with Sri Ramakrishna at their centre. We enjoy the theatre, music, singing, dancing, humour, worship, meditation, and samadhi. Reading the *Gospel* drives away loneliness and boredom. The *Gospel* presents to us the divine drama of Sri Ramakrishna with various characters representing all types of people: intellectuals, devotees, hypocrites, drunkards, householders, monks, actors, actresses, musicians, and so on. We visualise and enjoy the Master's super acting with Keshab, Vijay, Ram, Narendra, Balaram, M. and others in different places, such as Dakshineswar, Brahmo Temple, Balaram's house, Shyampukur, Cossipore, and so on.

Swami Bhajanananda once wrote: 'Every great religion has its own scripture. There are several scriptures already existing in the world, including the Vedas, Avesta, Tripitaka, the Bible, and the Koran. Do we need one more? Yes, precisely because there are several scriptures: We need just one more to show the validity of every one of them and to establish their overall harmony. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* compiled by M. serves this purpose admirably well' (85).

M.'s chronicle of Sri Ramakrishna's life is fascinating, in part because he himself played a vital role. Sometimes he was a silent witness to the divine drama of Sri Ramakrishna; at other times, he was an active participant in the play. In addition,

M.'s love for the Master was extraordinary. His I-consciousness was saturated with Ramakrishna-consciousness. If this were not so, he never could have produced *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, which is unique among the world's religious literature. Faithfully and vividly, M. chronicled the Master's samadhi and meditation, his prayer and worship, his dreams and visions, actions and devotion, purity and renunciation, singing and dancing, humour and mimicry, sadhana and pilgrimage, behaviour and psychology, religion and philosophy, and his social and scientific outlook. But most important, M. preserved Sri Ramakrishna's conversations with God, as well as his discussions with the people who came to him, his love and empathy for others, and his fervent concern for his devotees.

M. writes in the *Gospel*:

The Master was weeping and praying to the Mother in a voice choked with emotion. He prayed to Her with tearful eyes for the welfare of the devotees: 'Mother, may those who come to You have all their desires fulfilled! But please don't make them give up everything at once, Mother. Well, You may do whatever You like in the end. If You keep them in the world, Mother, then please reveal Yourself to them now and then. Otherwise, how will they live? How will they be encouraged if they don't see You once in a while?'<sup>47</sup>

Christopher Isherwood wrote about *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*: 'It's a fascinating piece of biography, quite extraordinarily honest. And as for its being long, the truth about

There is nothing in mere scholarship. The object of study is to find means of knowing God and realizing Him. A holy man had a book. When asked what it contained, he opened it and showed that on all the pages were written the words 'Om Rama', and nothing else.

—*Gospel*, 104.



Picture of Sri Chaitanya Gifted to M. by Sri Ramakrishna, Preserved in his Room at Kathamrita Bhavan

anyone is never dull. Try it; I don't think you'll be disappointed.<sup>48</sup>

Hundreds of people came to Sri Ramakrishna with their questions and problems. Some came out of curiosity. Scholars came, and so did scientists, doctors, lawyers, teachers, professors, and students. Spiritual leaders and social reformers visited him, as did actors, actresses, dramatists, singers, and dancers. Hypocrites, drunkards, ruffians, and villains also came. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is the firsthand account of the conversations that these various characters had with Sri Ramakrishna. Each person can find her or his own personality reflected in a character in the *Gospel*.

Sitting on his wooden cot in the temple garden

of Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna offered solutions to the problems of those who came to him because his own life was free from problems. Only a person whose life is trouble-free can solve another's problems. Sri Ramakrishna also boosted the spirits of his visitors. As he himself said: 'I have cooked food, simply sit down to partake of it.'<sup>49</sup>

On another occasion he said: 'I am the destroyer of karma. I am the French colony.'<sup>50</sup> At that time India was divided among three colonial powers: British, French, and Portuguese. If a man did something wrong in British India, he could take shelter in the French colony where the British had no jurisdiction. 'I am the French colony' means that whatever sins one may be



guilty of, one need only take shelter in Sri Ramakrishna to be free from fear of punishment for them. No worldly rules can bind such a person. Only a saviour has the power to protect people from the consequences of their actions.

The subject of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is God and *God alone*. It is concerned with how to realise God and nothing else. Sri Ramakrishna frequently made this simple statement: 'I know only God and nothing else.' In the beginning, in the middle, and in the end of the *Gospel*, you will find only one thing: God.

Ordinary people *preach* religion, but divine incarnations like Buddha, Christ, Krishna, and Sri Ramakrishna can *give* religion. Religion means realisation. A touch, a glance, or a word from one of the incarnations can spark a life-altering transformation in a human being. Sri Ramakrishna was a tremendous spiritual force that could awaken God-consciousness in an instant. He was a spiritual phenomenon! In the *Gospel* we find him in samadhi one moment, while the next he is making fun and cutting jokes. He was that prince who could travel through all seven stories of the royal palace, the seven levels of consciousness, without any restriction. Ordinary people live on the first floor and do not know what is on the other six floors. Even Sri Ramakrishna's jokes and frivolities were connected with God.

Some people consider religious talk to be dry, dull, difficult, disgusting, and distasteful. That is the reason that during class, some doze, yawn, and some leave to go out and chat with their friends. Sri Ramakrishna's conversations in the *Gospel* are so captivating, uplifting, and inspiring that everyone in the audience remains spellbound. It is amazing how he presented the highest truth through simple stories, folklore, parables, and even humour. On 19 September 1884 the Master told a Vaishnava devotee about

various tendencies of human beings. During the religious festival, each sect—Vaishnavas, Shaktas, Kartabhajas—has its own booth. The followers of each sect assemble their respective place and watch the images of Radha-Krishna, Shiva-Durga, Sita-Rama. 'But', Sri Ramakrishna said, 'it is quite different with those who are not spiritually minded at all. In the *Baroari*, public festival, one sees another image also—a prostitute beating her paramour with a broomstick. Those people stand there with gaping mouths and cry to their friends: "What are you looking at over there? Come here! Look at this."<sup>51</sup> All laughed. He further said: 'I don't give the youngsters a pure vegetarian dish: now and then I give them a little water smelling of fish. Otherwise, why should they come?' (540-1).

Christopher Isherwood wrote: 'Another side of Ramakrishna which seems to me important is that he had a sense of fun, and that he was joyous. It is a tragic mistake that the popular idea of a good person is so often that of someone rather dull and somber, someone who rarely laughs. Whereas in actual fact it seems that the joy, the sheer pleasure even, of approaching God surpasses anything we know.'<sup>52</sup> In the *Gospel*, M. notes in many places: 'All laugh,' or 'Laughter.'

Traditional Vaishnavas observe the annual festival of their Bhagavata scripture. A devotee suggested to M. that he observe the

**W**hat is the significance of the Gita? It is what you find by repeating the word ten times. It is then reversed into 'tagi', which means a person who has renounced everything for God. And the lesson of the Gita is: 'O man, renounce everything and seek God alone.' Whether a man is a monk or a householder, he has to shake off all attachment from his mind.—*Gospel*, 104-5.

birth-anniversary of the *Kathamrita*. M. said: 'The Master's words are the Vedas. He himself said that "the Bhakta (devotee), Bhagavata (scripture), and Bhagavan (God) are one". Bhagavata is nothing but the words of God. *Kathamrita* is His words, so is the Bhagavata. It reminds me of an episode. One day the Master was seated on his small cot and told me, "Look, God speaks through my mouth."

A devotee said to M.: 'Reading the *Kathamrita* it seems that you were with the Master all the time.' M. replied: 'No, I did not live with him all the time. But he used to say, "One becomes immortal, whether one drinks one drop or one pitcher of the nectar from the ocean of immortality." That is my only hope. I tried to preserve a very small portion of the Master's words in the *Kathamrita*. No one can write his entire words.'<sup>53</sup>

### **The Invocation of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna**

According to Indian tradition, the author of a scripture is supposed to introduce the text with an invocation consisting of an auspicious verse or a salutation mantra. Following that custom, M. placed the following verse on the title page of each of the five volumes of his original Bengali *Kathamrita*.

*'Tava kathamritam tapta jivanam kavibhir-  
iditam kalmashapaham, shravana-mangalam  
shrimad-atatam bhuvi grinanti ye bhurida  
janah; O Lord, your nectar-like words relieve  
the burning misery of afflicted souls. Your  
words, which poets have sung in verses, des-  
troy the sins of worldly people forever. Blessed  
are they who hear of your vast glory. Blessed  
indeed are those who speak of you. How un-  
paralleled is their bounty!'*<sup>54</sup>

The above-quoted invocation is taken from the *Gopi-Gita* of the Bhagavata. Krishna

promised to meet the gopis, the milkmaids of Vrindaban, on a full-moon night in autumn. That night, the gopis came to meet Krishna on the bank of the Yamuna River, and he played affectionately with them. But he sensed that they had become proud and egotistic due to this rare privilege, so he suddenly disappeared from them. Grief-stricken, the gopis wept and prayed to him to return. The above verse is from that prayer.

*Tava kathamritam*: 'Your words, O Lord, are like nectar.' We sometimes say, 'Oh, your words are so sweet!' But having no nectar ourselves, we do not know how to speak nectar-like words. The divine incarnations have this nectar within and so their words are full of sweetness.

*Amrita* means 'nectar' and also 'immortality'. According to Hindu mythology, the gods and the demons churned the ocean in order to obtain nectar. After a hard struggle, they extracted a jar of it. But the gods deceived the demons and drank it all, becoming immortal. This immortality, however, was relative: Absolute immortality comes only from the knowledge of Brahman. That nectar is within all beings. Jesus said, 'The kingdom of heaven is within you.' Dive deep inside. Then you will find that nectar and attain immortality.

God is the ocean of *amrita*, nectar. Once Sri Ramakrishna asked Swamiji: "Suppose there were a cup of syrup and you were a fly. Where would you sit to drink the syrup?" Narendra said, "I would sit on the edge of the cup and stretch out my neck to drink it." "Why?" I asked. "What's the harm of plunging into the middle of the cup and drinking the syrup?" Narendra answered, "Then I should stick in the syrup and die." "My child," I said to him, "that isn't the nature of the Nectar of Satchidananda. It is the Nectar of Immortality. Man does not die from diving into It. On the contrary he becomes immortal."<sup>55</sup>

We say that human beings are mortal, but this is not true. The body is mortal. The Atman, our real nature, is immortal. It is this immortality that humankind is always searching for. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says that when Yajnavalkya offered wealth to his beloved wife, Maitreyi, she replied: 'What should I do with that wealth which would not make me immortal?'<sup>56</sup> This is the bold message of Vedanta to modern people. If you want immortality, give up whatever you have. Christ also said the same thing: 'Sell what you have and then follow me. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.'

The Bengali title of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, which means 'Sri Ramakrishna's immortal (or nectar-like) words.' We hear the *Gospel*; we read the *Gospel*; we speak about the *Gospel*; but we do not 'drink' the *Gospel*. It does not matter if we drink a drop, a glass, a jar, or a barrel of *amrita*. We will be immortal. It is not a matter of quantity, but of the substance itself. If we could actually absorb the *Gospel*, all our worldly desires would quickly dissipate. But it is not easy. We like to hold on to our desires: That is our problem.

Sri Ramakrishna told this beautiful parable:

Once a fishwife was a guest in the house of a gardener who raised flowers. She came there with her empty basket, after selling fish in the market, and was asked to sleep in a room where flowers were kept. But, because of the fragrance of the flowers, she couldn't get to sleep for a long time. Her hostess saw her condition and said, 'Hello! Why are you tossing from side to side so restlessly?' The fishwife said: 'I don't know, friend. Perhaps the smell of the flowers has been disturbing my sleep. Can you give me my fish-basket? Perhaps that will put me to sleep.' The basket was brought to her. She sprinkled water on it and set it near her nose. Then she fell sound asleep and snored all night.<sup>57</sup>



Photograph of Some of the Pictures that Used to Adorn Sri Ramakrishna's bedroom

Worldly people like the smell of fish. They cannot stand a beautiful divine fragrance. Mere speaking, mere talking, mere hearing won't help us. We may repeat the word 'wine' a thousand times but that will not make us intoxicated. We

One should constantly remember death. Nothing will survive death. We are born into this world to perform certain duties, like the people who come from the countryside to Calcutta on business. If a visitor goes to a rich man's garden, the superintendent says to him, 'This is our garden,' 'This is our lake,' and so forth. But if the superintendent is dismissed for some misdeed, he can't carry away even his mango-wood chest. He sends it secretly by the gate-keeper. (Laughter).—*Gospel*, 105.



must drink the wine. Christ said, 'Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock.'<sup>58</sup>

*Tapta jivanam*: 'Your words relieve the burning misery of worldly life.' The world is burning with misery. When we talk about life we heave a deep sigh. I remember that once when I was a young student of Vedanta I heard a vivid description of this world. Our teacher was expounding the concept of maya. He said: 'Do you know what this world is? A traveller was passing through a desert. The sun was scorching hot. He was dead tired, thirsty, hungry, and exhausted. He was trying to find shelter, a shady place where he could take a little rest. At last he found a place where he laid down his head and slept, not knowing that the spot was made shady by the shadow of a poisonous cobra's hood! A single hiss and one drop of poison from that cobra would finish his life. So that is this world.' We do not know how the mysterious maya traps, binds, and enslaves us.

Human beings are tormented by desire,

doubt, disease, death, passion, jealousy, hatred, anger, and so many other things. This is truly hell. The word of the Lord alone rescues us from this awful situation. The gospel of the Lord carries solace and succour for suffering humanity. It soothes our nerves and brings us peace and joy. Just as water extinguishes fire, the words of the Lord extinguish the burning misery caused by worldly desires and our enjoyment of them.

Krishna said in the Gita: 'Having come into this transitory, joyless world, worship me.'<sup>59</sup> Jesus said: 'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'<sup>60</sup> Similarly, we see how Sri Ramakrishna showered peace and bliss to suffering humanity by his stories and immortal words. In fact, the words of *Kathamrita* acts like mantras for forgetting the world.

*Kavibhir-uditam*: 'Poets eulogise the words of the Lord in many ways.' A renaissance begins with the advent of each avatar. Many books and dramas are written, songs and music are composed, and artworks and sculptures are developed. Sri Ramakrishna spoke but a few words, and Swamiji expounded that message of

the harmony of religions and the divinity of human beings, spreading it throughout the world. M. recorded the Master's immortal gospel, while the actor-dramatist Girish Chandra Ghosh wrote several dramas that incorporated the ideas of Sri Ramakrishna. Again, many poets composed songs based on the teachings of the Master. But Sri Ramakrishna himself had no formal education. His knowledge came straight from God. One day he said: 'If you want to understand in one sentence,

*The Holy Mother's Pictures Used by Sri M.*



come to me. If you want to understand the same thing in a thousand words, go to Keshab.<sup>61</sup> Keshab Chandra Sen, the Brahmo Samaj leader, was a famous orator. It was he who first wrote about Sri Ramakrishna, in his Brahmo papers and magazines. When the Master came to know about it, he said, 'Keshab, by writing about me, you want to make me famous? Don't try. He whom Mother makes famous, becomes famous.'

*Kalmashapaham*: The words of God 'destroy all kinds of sins and their results.' God's name purifies our bodies and minds. Try to visualise the world as a room freshly painted with black paint. You are there, dressed in white clothes. You may be extremely cautious, but you cannot be alert all the time. In one moment of forgetfulness, you will spoil your clothes. So it happens in this world: Desire, doubt, pride, anger, jealousy, greed, and lust are continually polluting our minds. Human beings stumble and fall, overcome by temptations. But they should not yield helplessly; they must fight. The Atman manifests in a human being through three powers: *jnana-shakti*—wisdom, *ichha-shakti*—will, and *kriya-shakti*—action. Life is a struggle. Only two groups of people do not have to struggle: the illumined and the dead. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* helps us develop a strong discriminative faculty and protects us from weakness and temptation.

Sri Ramakrishna did not care for the Christian doctrine of sin. He said: 'He who says day and night, "I am a sinner, I am a sinner" verily becomes a sinner.'<sup>62</sup> 'All the sins of the body fly away if one chants the name of God and sings His glories. The birds of sin dwell in the tree of the body. Singing the name of God is like clapping your hands. As, at a clap of the hands, the birds in the tree fly away, so do our sins disappear at the chanting of God's name and glories' (181–2). What a gospel of hope!

*Shravana-mangalam*: Anybody who 'hears

the words of God will undoubtedly be benefited'. If one eats a chilli, knowingly or unknowingly, one's tongue will burn. It can't be helped. Similarly, these words of the Lord definitely do people good. One may think that just hearing the *Gospel* will not give one the flavour of it, but it will.

*Shrimad*: Beautiful. The words of the Lord are beautiful; they are truly enchanting and delightful. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* draws us irresistibly to God.

*Atatam*: 'Vast and easily available.' Just as we do not need to search for space and air because they surround us, so the words of God are easily accessible. Those who are spiritual aspirants get divine inebriation from the *Gospel*, but it comes gradually and slowly, as the *Gospel* reveals its truths according to the aspirant's spiritual development and understanding. *The Gospel* has an intoxicating effect. We may read it a thousand times, yet it remains an endless source of inspiration. Truth never becomes old—it is always fresh. There is no end to spiritual experience, and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is a unique chronicle of the highest immeasurable realisations. Once a disciple of the Holy Mother said that he had read *Kathamrita* fifty times and still he was finding new light in it. The message of God is endless. An American student read the *Gospel* and remarked: 'There is one defect in this book: it has an end.'

*Bhuvi grinanti ye bhurida janah*: You may 'perform charity in various forms, but the best charity is to distribute the word of God to humanity.' This final Sanskrit phrase has another

**B**rahman and Shakti are identical, like fire and its power to burn. When we talk of fire we automatically mean also its power to burn. Again, the fire's power to burn implies the fire itself. If you accept the one you must accept the other.

—*Gospel*, 108.

meaning: Those who are spiritual seekers, those who have done spiritual practices in previous lives and also in this very life, get bliss, which is the flavour of spirituality.

Despite the cancer in his throat, Sri Ramakrishna taught whoever came to him. He never turned anyone away. He said, 'Let me be condemned to be born over and over again, even in the form of a dog, if so I can be of help to a single soul! ... I will give up twenty thousand such bodies to help one man.'<sup>63</sup>

### ***Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings in the Gospel***

The qualifications for studying Vedanta are extremely difficult to meet. A Vedanta student should practise discrimination, renunciation, and control of the senses; and she or he should have a burning desire for liberation. But if you

*The Punjabi Kurta Used by Sri Ramakrishna  
Preserved in Sri M.'s Room*



want to read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, no qualifications are necessary; no commentator is necessary; no teacher is necessary. It is simple. Simplicity was Sri Ramakrishna's style, so his sentences are seldom complicated. Simplicity is holiness.

Aldous Huxley wrote in the foreword to Swami Nikhilananda's translation: 'What a scholastic philosopher would call the "accidents" of Sri Ramakrishna's life were intensely Hindu and therefore, so far as we in the West are concerned, unfamiliar and hard to understand; its "essence", however, was intensely mystical and therefore universal.'<sup>64</sup>

Though the background and plots of Sri Ramakrishna's stories and parables are Indian in origin, they are so vivid and simple, so enchanting, that even a child can understand them. A man once came to Sri Ramakrishna and asked, 'Sir, how can I realize God?' He answered: 'The point is, to love God even as the mother loves her child, the chaste wife her husband, and the worldly man his wealth. Add together these three forces of love, these three powers of attraction, and give it all to God. Then you will certainly see Him' (83).

Sri Ramakrishna's stories and parables are very positive, instructive, and uplifting. He was always inspiring. His parable of the woodcutter is typical: 'A wood-cutter once entered a forest to gather wood. A brahmachari said to him, "Go forward." He obeyed the injunction and discovered some sandal-wood trees. After a few days he reflected, "The holy man asked me to go forward. He didn't tell me to stop here." So he went forward and found a silver-mine. After a few days he went still farther and discovered a gold-mine, and next, mines of diamonds and precious stones. With these he became immensely rich' (109). Sri Ramakrishna said that there was no end to spiritual bliss, spiritual illumination.



Sri Ramakrishna's teachings are also practical: 'To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest.'

'Sir, I cannot go to the forest.'

'All right. Meditate in the corner of a room.'

'Sir, my house is full of people. I cannot get a corner of a room.'

'Meditate in the inner chamber of your heart.'

There are many alternatives. If you cannot do anything at all, surrender to the Lord and He will do everything for you. 'Give me the power of attorney', said Sri Ramakrishna. Only an avatar like Sri Ramakrishna could say that. Sri Ramakrishna gave the example of a mother cat carrying her kitten wherever she wants. The kitten completely surrenders itself.

Another beautiful metaphor that Sri Ramakrishna used concerns three men who were curious to know what was on the other side of a high wall. The first man climbed up a ladder and found infinite bliss on the other side. He immediately laughed and jumped into it. The second man did the same thing. The third man also climbed up and saw what was there, but he came back down to tell others of that infinite bliss behind the wall, behind maya. That third man is Sri Ramakrishna. In the evening when the sound of the vesper bells reverberated through the Dakshineswar temple compound, Sri Ramakrishna would climb up onto the roof of the kuthi [mansion] and call out for his future devotees: 'Where are you, my children? Do come, one and all. I cannot do any more without seeing you.'<sup>65</sup>

In 1916 Swami Brahmananda told a young girl who asked for advice from him: 'Daughter, the train is coming. I don't have much time, but I will give you knowledge in one sentence: Read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* regularly every day. That is enough. You will find in this book the truth of all religions.'

In 1924 at Belur Math Swami Vijnanananda

said to M.: 'Master Mahashay, the Master is unique so is the recorder of his gospel. Every time I read the *Gospel*, it appears new to me. What an excellent book you have produced! On inquiry I learned that ninety percent of the monks joined the Sri Ramakrishna monastery after reading *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.'<sup>66</sup>

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is a large volume, and it is expensive. But whatever the price may be, no price can be put on the value of those words. Sri Ramakrishna had a householder disciple, an *ishvarakoti*—godlike soul—whose name was Purna Chandra Ghosh. Long after Sri Ramakrishna passed away, there was trouble in Purna's family and he wanted to commit suicide. He decided to bathe first, and then pay his respects to his guru before killing himself. He took a bath, then went to the shrine and bowed down to the Master. But then he thought: 'Let me read a little bit of the *Kathamrita*. Taking the beautiful message of the Master, I shall depart from this world.' He opened the book at random and his eyes fell on this sentence: '*Purna balak bhakta. Thakur Purner mangal chinta koritechen*—Purna is a young devotee. The Master was thinking of his welfare.' 'What?' cried Purna. 'The Master is thinking of me and I shall commit suicide? Impossible! He is thinking of my welfare and I am contemplating killing myself. It cannot be.'<sup>67</sup> He gave up the idea and thus his life was saved. Such is the power of the words of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*!

The mind of the yogi is always fixed on God, always absorbed in the Self. You can recognize such a man by merely looking at him. His eyes are wide open, with an aimless look, like the eyes of the mother bird hatching her eggs. Her entire mind is fixed on the eggs, and there is a vacant look in her eyes. —*Gospel*, 113.

### A Blessing from the Holy Mother

The Holy Mother had a great appreciation for *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. On 2 April 1905 the Holy Mother, Golap-ma, and Nikunja Devi—M.'s wife—were listening to the *Gospel* being read. When the reading was over, the Holy Mother commented: 'It is not a small thing to remember the Master's words and ideas, and then write them. I wholeheartedly bless M.: Let his books spread everywhere and let all people know him.'

Another day when someone was reading the *Gospel*, Holy Mother was listening with deep absorption. Golap-ma, Nikunja Devi, and some other women were seated there. After some time Holy Mother exclaimed: 'How wonderful! How Master Mahashay kept these teachings in his mind! Did he go to the Master with paper and pencil?'

*Chandi Mangal Ghat Installed by the Holy Mother at M.'s House*



Nikunja Devi: 'No, Mother. He would write these things from his memory.'

Holy Mother: 'What a powerful brain he has! He wrote all these things from memory.'

Golap-ma: 'Naren also had a powerful mind.'

Holy Mother: 'He had a different kind of power—for lecturing, writing books, and so on. M. has another kind of power. [Addressing Nikunja Devi] My daughter, give your husband more milk [which is supposed to increase mental power]. May he attain more power. Ah, what a great service he is giving to the world!'

The reading continued.

'The Master said to Mani: "You are all my relatives."'

Holy Mother commented: 'Of course, everyone is in his inner circle.'

Another section was read: 'Keshab was coughing.'

To this, the crazy aunt [Radhu's mother] said, 'Why did M. write such a thing?' Holy Mother replied with a smile: 'What do you know? It has a purpose.'

The reader was reading a passage about the Master's ecstasy: 'M. was thinking: Is the Master describing his own state?'

Holy Mother commented: 'Yes, M.'s thinking was correct.' After a while Holy Mother said to Nikunja Devi: 'My daughter, tell your husband that I am blessing him wholeheartedly.'<sup>68</sup>

### Appreciations

M. tried to hide himself in the pages of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by using several pseudonyms, such as Mani, Master, Mohinimohan, a Devotee, a Servant, an Englishman, and so on; but readers quickly discovered him. While intending to make his guru well known, he became famous himself. Truly, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* made M. immortal. Here are a few appreciations of his great work.

Swami Premananda wrote to M. on 28 September 1897:

Two copies of your *Gospel* are just to hand, also a p.c. [post card]. I am just now going to send one copy for Swami Vivekananda. How are you doing now? We are very anxious to see you and hear from you 'the *Gospel* of our Lord', so carefully kept by yourself. Not only I, but all of us, especially our boys, sannnyasins and brahmacharins are anxious to have your holy company and hear from your 'Gospel'.<sup>69</sup>

Girish Chandra Ghosh wrote on 22 March 1909:

If my humble opinion goes for anything I not only fully endorse the opinion of the great Swami Vivekananda but add in a loud voice that the *Kathamrita* has been my very existence during my protracted illness for the last three years. ... You deserve the gratitude of the whole human race to the end of days.<sup>70</sup>

Swami Ramakrishnananda wrote on 27 October 1904:

You have left the whole of humanity in debt by publishing these invaluable pages fraught with the best wisdom of the greatest avatar of God (ibid.).

In December 1897 Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyay wrote in the journal *Dawn*:

We are extremely thankful to our friend M., whom we may introduce to the reader as an unassuming gentleman of high spiritual attainments, and a devoted servant of his Lord and Master, *Sri Ramakrishna*, for having given us an opportunity of presenting to our readers what we may most appropriately call, 'A Modern Gospel'—which breathes throughout a deep catholicity in reference to all forms of religious discipline and is therefore at war with not *one* of them.<sup>71</sup>

Mr N Ghosh wrote in the *Indian Nation* on 19 May 1902:

*Ramakrishna Kathamrita* by M. (Part I) is a work of singular value and interest. He has done a kind of work which no Bengalee had ever done before, which so far as we are aware no native of India had ever done. It has been done only once in history namely by Boswell. ... What a treasure would it have been to the world if all the sayings of Sri Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, Nanak, and Chaitanya could have been thus preserved (3.viii).

Nagendra Nath Gupta who personally knew Sri Ramakrishna, wrote in *Ramakrishna-Vivekananda* in 1933:

'The Gospel of Ramakrishna Paramahansa is a record taken at first hand. The words were taken down as they came fresh from the lips of the Master. They were frequently read over to him and he suggested alterations and corrections. There is no room for imagination or exaggeration in anything that concerns Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Much about the earlier prophets is wrapped in uncertainty and speculation. There are no real likenesses of Buddha, Christ, and Chaitanya. Ramakrishna's photographs are available everywhere. His spoken words are available to all almost just as he uttered them' (2.306).

The *Brahmavadin* published a review in April 1902:

The life of no prophet has ever been written in the way in which M. has done it in the book under review. Even Boswell's life of Johnson falls into shade before this magnificent record of the

Once I went with Mathur to Raja Babu's drawing-room in Benares. I found that they talked there only of worldly matters—money, real estate, and the like. At this I burst into tears. I said to the Divine Mother, weeping: 'Mother! Where hast Thou brought me? I was much better off at Dakshineswar.' —*Gospel*, 129.



Paramahansa's sayings and doings during the last two years of his life. To the student of psychology and psychic research these conversations are of immense value. They give us a peep into the workings of an extraordinary mind which has risen above the din and incessant devouring activity of this work-a-day world to the eternal presence of the music of the higher spheres. They point out how a Godman who has attained spiritual oneness and realized universal harmony becomes the interpreter of God to man. The dialogues of Socrates resemble to some extent these conversations but without the sublime and tranquil ecstasies of the oriental saint.<sup>72</sup>

Romain Rolland, a French writer and Nobel Prize winner, wrote to M.:

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is valuable for it is the faithful account by M. of the discourses with the Master, either his own or those which

he actually heard for the next four years. Their exactitude is almost stenographic. The book containing the conversations (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) recalls at every turn the setting and the atmosphere. Thanks for having disseminated the radiance of the beautiful Smile of your Master.<sup>73</sup>

Aldous Huxley, an English novelist and essayist, wrote in his foreword to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*:

M., as the author modestly styles himself, was peculiarly qualified for his task. To a reverent love for his Master, to a deep and experiential knowledge of that master's teaching, he added a prodigious memory for the small happenings of each day and a happy gift for recording them in an interesting and realistic way. Making good use of his natural gifts and of the circumstances in which he found himself, M. produced a book

*The Paduka—Footwears of Sri. M. Preserved in his House, now Known as Kathamrita Bhavan*



unique, so far as my knowledge goes, in the literature of hagiography. No other saint has had so able and indefatigable a Boswell. Never have the small events of a contemplative's daily life been described with such a wealth of intimate detail. Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute a fidelity.<sup>74</sup>

Muhammad Daud Rahbar, a writer and professor of Boston University, wrote:

I have read some delightful portions of the one-thousand-page *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. This marvellous volume has extraordinary revelations. Immediately one recognizes a cherishable friend in Sri Ramakrishna. His open, passionate, and transparent devotion humbles and chastens us. He is no common mortal. He is a man of phenomenal gifts. His presence is a haven. His conversations, recorded abundantly in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by his disciple M., are charming, inspired. Their literary merit is due to the inspired goodness of Sri Ramakrishna.<sup>75</sup>

Christopher Isherwood, an English novelist, wrote:

M. shows us Ramakrishna by day and by night, chiefly at Dakshineswar but also at the houses of Balaram and other devotees, on river-boats with Keshab Sen, or driving in a carriage through the streets. Usually, there are quite a lot of people present: disciples, householder devotees and casual visitors. Naturally, they tend to ask Ramakrishna the same questions and so Ramakrishna's answers often repeat or paraphrase themselves. M. records these repetitions, as well as the words of all the songs Ramakrishna sings. A newcomer to the *Gospel* may find this tiresome at first. But, if he reads the book straight through from beginning to end, instead of merely dipping into it, he will probably agree that it is these very repetitions which give the narrative its continuity and its sense of life actually being lived from day to day. In any case, a teacher who never repeats himself is a creation of art and editorship rather than a live being!

The most important function of Ramakrishna as a teacher was available to householder devotee and monastic disciple alike. Both had the opportunity of watching him in the silence of samadhi, in the incoherent mutterings of ecstasy, in the radiant joy of devotional dancing and song. And it was in these manifestations that even some casual visitors to Dakshineswar caught a glimpse of Ramakrishna's true nature. To those who were not utterly insensitive, this was a demonstration, more convincing than the Master's most eloquent words, of the reality of God's presence.

The service M. has rendered us and future generations can hardly be exaggerated. Even the vainest of authors might well have been humbled, finding himself entrusted with such a task. M. was the least vain. M. embodies Ramakrishna's ideal of the householder devotee.<sup>76</sup>

N Bangarayya, a journalist, wrote in his reminiscences of M.:

I became fully convinced that it is impossible for anybody to add to the charm of Ramakrishna. M. spoke beautifully; but there was a distinct and ineffaceable barrier between the two styles, the style of the Master as the disciple has recorded and the style of the disciple himself. The originality, suggestiveness, simplicity, and directness of the former are all its own. It soars far above the reach of any human intellect, be it ever so great. It is not possible for anyone to have invented for the world 'The Ramakrishna Art.' It is greatness enough to have been preserved.<sup>77</sup>

Sarala Devi, later Pravrajika Bharatiprana, recalled:

I had to practise each religion for a time--Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. Furthermore, I followed the paths of the Saktas, Vaishnavas, and Vedantists. I realized that there is only one God toward whom all are travelling; but the paths are different. —*Gospel*, 129.

Revered M. presented me a copy of the *Kathamrita* and asked me to read it. He also told me that he would give me other volumes in the future if I liked them. He later gave me the other three volumes. Seeing my set of the *Kathamrita*, the Holy Mother remarked: 'M. is very fond of Sarala and he has presented her his wonderful books. Well, Sarala, please read a little to me from them.' I used to read the *Kathamrita* to the Mother. She would listen very attentively and joyfully tell us the stories of olden days. Recounting the stories of the Master in Dakshineswar, the Mother said: 'M. is so clever that he has recorded the Master's words just as they were. Truly, the Master would speak in that way. Now he is publishing those teachings in book form. Thus so many people are able to know of the Master. I also heard so many things from the Master. I would have recorded them if I had known that these teachings would be published. Well, my child, who could guess that such things would happen.'<sup>78</sup>



## Notes and References

1. This article has been adapted from Swami Chetanananda, 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna: History' in Swami Chetanananda, *Mahendra Nath Gupta: The Recorder of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2011), 234–76.
2. Swami Chetanananda, *Ramakrishna as We Saw Him* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1993), 126.
3. Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2001), 189.
4. Brajendra Nath Bandyopadhyay and Sajani Kanta Das, *Samasamayik Drishtite Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa* (Bengali) (Calcutta: General, 1968), 122.
5. Sunil Behari Ghosh, a researcher and librarian, presumed that *Paramahamsadever Ukti*—Part One was compiled and published by Keshab Chandra Sen in 1878, and Part Two was collected and published by Girish Chandra Sen in 1887, and Part Three by M. in 1892. Behind his guess is that

none could ever find Parts One and Two made by M. (Adapted from Anonymous, *Sri Ramakrishna O Tar Kathamrita* (Bengali) (Howrah: Ramakrishna Vivekananda Ashrama, 1983), 219.)

6. *Srima, Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, 5 vols (Bengali) (Calcutta: Kathamrita Bhavan, 1951), 3.vi.
7. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 6.412–3.
8. Sankari Prasad Basu, *Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharatvarsha*, 7 vols (Bengali) (Calcutta: Mandal, 1976), 2.275.
9. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, 3.v.
10. *Sri Ramakrishna O Tar Kathamrita*, 220.
11. This event took place before M. met Sri Ramakrishna. M. collected the information from a reliable source and recorded it in his diary. He later developed and added it in the *Kathamrita* as an appendix.
12. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 1019.
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15. *Srima Sarada*, 6.8.
16. *Srima Darshan*, 13.184.
17. *Gospel*, 662–4.
18. Swami Chetanananda, *Srima Samipe* (Bengali) (Kolkata: Udbodhan, 2005), 32.
19. *Gospel*, 270.
20. *Devi Mahatmyam*, 4.11.
21. Swami Chetanananda, *Mahendra Nath Gupta* (St Louis: Vedanta Society, 2011), 467, 469.
22. *Ramakrishna as We Saw Him*, 321–3.
23. H H Halley, *Halley's Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1965), 493.
24. *Gospel*, 407.
25. *Samasamayik Drishtite Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa*, 3.
26. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 5.259.
27. *Belur Math Rule Book*, 10.
28. *Complete Works*, 6.64.
29. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Advaita Ashrama: Calcutta, 1931), 89–90. /

**T**he truth is that no one seeks God. There are people who eat the prickly leaves of the pineapple and not the fruit.

—*Gospel*, 185.



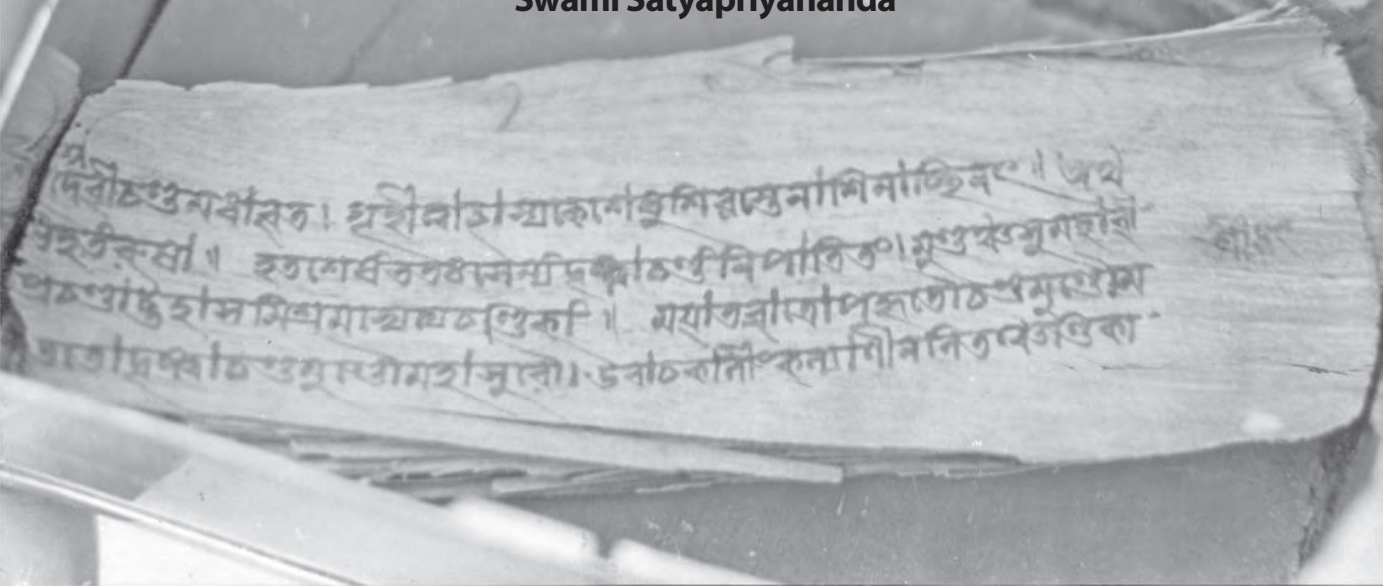
- Great Master, 366.
30. *Gospel*, 376.
  31. 'Leaves From The Gospel Of The Lord Sree Ramakrishna', *The Brahmavadin*, 3/3 (15 October 1897), 3.104.
  32. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Centenary Memorial*, eds. D P Gupta and D K Sengupta, (Chandigarh: Srma Trust, 1982), 147.
  33. Swami Abhedananda, *Gospel of Ramakrishna*, vii-ix.
  34. *Srima Darshan*, 5.126.
  35. *Srima Darshan*, 3.295-7.
  36. Abhay Chandra Bhattacharya, *Srimar Jivan Darshan* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Grantha Bharati, 1990), 351.
  37. From the back cover of the *Gospel*.
  38. *Srima Darshan*, 5.55-7.
  39. Vide Deed of Endowment by Rani Rasmani dated 18 February 1861. Tota Puri came to Dakshineswar in 1864.
  40. It was Hriday, according to the *Lilaprasanga* by Swami Saradananda.
  41. Sri Ramakrishna first met Keshab Sen in 1864 at the Adi Brahma Samaj, but became closely acquainted with him only in 1875 at Jaygopal Sen's garden house in Belgharia.
  42. *Srima Darshan*, 6.103-10.
  43. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2010), 780.
  44. *Bhagavadgita*, 10.13.
  45. Srma, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (Kathamrita Bhavan: Calcutta, 1957), 1.129 and *Gospel*, 266.
  46. *Ramakrishna Kathamrita Centenary Memorial*, 77, 79.
  47. *Gospel*, 381.
  48. *Vedanta for the Western World*, Ed. Christopher Isherwood, (Hollywood: The Marcel Rodd, 1945), 266.
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  50. 'Swami Turiyananda Smriti', *Udbodhan*, 37 (BS Shravan 1342), 359.
  51. *Gospel*, 540.
  52. *Vedanta for the Western World*, 267.
  53. *Srima Darshan*, 2.187.
  54. *Bhagavata*, 10.31.9.
  55. *Gospel*, 675.
  56. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 4.5.4.
  57. *Gospel*, 433-4.
  58. Matthew 7:24.
  59. *Gita*, 9.33.
  60. Matthew 11:28.
  61. Suresh Chandra Datta, *Sri Sri Ramakrishnadever Upadesh* (Calcutta: Haramohan Publishing, 1968), 162.
  62. *Gospel*, 138.
  63. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), 201.
  64. *Gospel*, v-vi.
  65. *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, 303.
  66. *Srima Darshan*, 11.130.
  67. Swami Abjajananda, *Swamijir Padaprante* (Bengali) (Belur Math: Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Pitha, 1972), 37.
  68. Swami Prabhananda, *Amritarup Ramakrishna* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1991), 201-2.
  69. *Srimar Jivan Darshan*, 344.
  70. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, 3.viii.
  71. *Vivekananda O Samakalin Bharatvarsha*, 2.302.
  72. *Amritarup Ramakrishna*, 184.
  73. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, (First edition), 5.iv.
  74. *Gospel*, v.
  75. *World Thinkers on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda*, ed. Swami Lokeshwarananda, (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1992), 13.
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  77. 'I Saw the Recording Angel', N Bangarayya, *Prabuddha Bharata*, 54/6 (June 1949), 228-9.
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Gulantha Plant Brought by M. from Dakshineswar



# An In-depth Study of the Ancient Hindu Scriptures and The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna for Spiritual Enrichment

Swami Satyapriyananda



*Sri Ramakrishna's Handwritten Script in Bengali*

**W**E READ in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* that Mahendranath Gupta aka M., asks the maid Brinde the question: Does he (Ramakrishna) read many books? to which Brinde replies, 'Books? Oh, dear no! They are all on his tongue.'<sup>1</sup> However, how much he had heard! We also read in the above spiritual treatise the following observation.

(To Hazra) 'What will you achieve by mere study of the scriptures? The scriptures contain

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a mixture of sand and sugar, as it were. It is extremely difficult to separate the sugar from the sand. Therefore one should learn the essence of the scriptures from the teacher or from a *sadhu*. Afterwards what does one care for books?

(To the devotees) 'Gather all the information and then plunge in. ... One should learn the essence of the scriptures from the guru and then practise *sadhana*. If one rightly follows spiritual discipline, then one directly sees God. *The discipline is said to be rightly followed only when one plunges in*. What will a man gain by merely reasoning about the words of the scriptures? Ah, the fools! ... They never take the plunge. ... You may say, even though you dive deep you

are still in danger of sharks and crocodiles, of lust and anger. But dive after rubbing your body with turmeric powder; then sharks and crocodiles will not come near you. *The turmeric is discrimination and renunciation*' (543) (Emphasis added).

Speaking in the same tone Sri Ramakrishna says: 'The pupil should hear the essence of the scriptures from the guru; then he should practise austerity and devotions ... The next thing is the practice of spiritual discipline' (694).

In another place we read:

He [Sri Ramakrishna] asked Mahima to recite verses describing the love of God. The latter recited from the *Narada Pancharatra*:

What need is there of penance if God is worshipped with love?

What is the use of penance if God is not worshipped with love?

What need is there of penance if God is seen within and without?

What is the use of penance if God is not seen within and without? (388–9).

A superficial reading of these quotations may mislead one to believe that studies and penance have no use in spiritual life. But that is not true. The real stress here is that scriptures are like a mixture of sand and sugar; like ants we have to pick and choose the sugar and abandon the sand. Or, it is comparable to milk with water mixed in it; we have to be like the fabled *paramahansa*, the great swan, which has some acid in the mouth it uses for splitting the milk part and leaving out the water portion. A guru does this for an earnest seeker. This makes it easier to practise *sadhana* under spiritual guidance. In our studies of scriptures and spiritual literature we thereby become focussed.

Seeing God within and without, as all-pervading, and loving him and him alone, is the

essence of spiritual practice. A few believe that they should engage themselves in unheard of penances. Mere penance will not be of any use. Yet people of demoniac nature practice severe penances not enjoined in the scriptures without realising that thereby they are torturing the indwelling God.<sup>2</sup> We have in the Gita:

*Natyashnatastu yogo'sti na chaikantamanash-natah; na chati svapnashilasya jagrato naiva charjuna. Yuktaharaviharasya yuktacheshtasya karmasu; yuktasvapnavabodhasya yogo bhavati dukkhaha*; yoga is not attained by one who eats too much or who eats nothing at all, nor by him who sleeps too much or who keeps awake too much, O Arjuna. He who is moderate in food and movements, in his engagement in action and in sleep and wakefulness, attains to Yoga which destroys misery (6.16–17).

### Benefits of Scriptural Study

Those who use computers know very well that there is a section: FAQ, frequently asked questions, and another with a similar name, NFAQ, not so frequently asked questions. Anyone can go to these sections and find the answer to the questions which are plaguing them. Scriptures serve that essential purpose for sincere seekers. Everyone treading a particular spiritual path finds that she or he needs guidelines and route maps for a successful journey. More so, one finds that scriptures often differ from one another and we need to go for further clarification into the commentaries to know how these apparently conflicting statements are resolved mutually or by delineating the persons for whom these instructions specifically apply.

The importance of studies in spiritual life can be best understood and appreciated by analysing

**M**aya is nothing but 'woman and gold'. A man living in its midst gradually loses his spiritual alertness. He thinks all is well with him. —Gospel, 131.





Yama, the God of Death, and Nachiketa

what scriptures say on various topics. It is hoped that this will serve the purpose of having a bird's eye-view of scriptural contents with the readers, who should build upon this for their own specific needs.

### **Suffering: The Way Out**

Spiritual quest begins with suffering in life. Why people suffer is an often-posed question. If God were indeed merciful then why should there be so much misery in his creation, or in other words, does God take sadistic pleasure when people suffer, and why some should suffer and others enjoy, or in other words, is God guilty of partiality? God is neither sadistic nor partial. We are the makers of our own fortune and what we will reap depends on what we do. Everyone wants to plan one's life so that one can lead a

happy and contented life. But what do we see in reality all around? There is emptiness, joylessness, misery, suffering—a total vacuum, as it were. What is that important message which scriptures give about what has gone wrong in our perception?

### **Futility of Secular Knowledge**

In the *Mundaka Upanishad* Saunaka raises the question: '*Kasminnu bhagavo vijnate sarvam-idam vijnatam bhavatiti*'; which is that thing which having been known, all this becomes known?'<sup>3</sup> Angiras gave this reply: '*Dve vidye veditavye iti ha sma yadbrahmavidō vadanti para chaivapara cha*'; there are two kinds of knowledge to be acquired—the higher and the lower.' '*Tatra-para rigvedo yajurvedah samavedo'tharvavedah shiksha kalpo vyakaranam niruktam chando*

*gyotishamiti. Atha para yaya tadaksharamadhyamya*; the lower knowledge comprises the four Vedas, the science of pronunciation, the code of rituals, grammar, etymology, metre, and astrology, and the higher knowledge is that by which is realised that imperishable Self' (1.1.4).

In a highly impressive narration in the *Chhandogya Upanishad*, Narada says to Sanatkumara: Venerable Sir, I know the four Vedas, the epics (Puranas) and ancient lore (Itihasa), grammar, the rules of the sacrifices, the science of numbers, the science of portents, the science of time, logic, ethics, etymology, the science of pronunciation, ceremonials, prosody, and so on, the science of elemental spirits, the science of weapons, astronomy, the science of serpents and the fine arts. Even after all this study, I know I am only a knower of texts, not a knower of Atman. I am afflicted with sorrow! I have heard from men like you that he who knows the Self overcomes sorrow.<sup>4</sup>

### Futility of Worldly Possessions

In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, we come across an interesting and instructive dialogue between Yajnavalkya and his wife Maitreyi. Yajnavalkya planned to renounce the life of a householder and enter into the *vanaprastha* ashrama in preparation for sannyasa. So he wanted to settle his property between Maitreyi and his other wife Kalyani. The intention of Yajnavalkya was to divide the secular property between his wives, leaving them in a state of satisfaction and immense comfort. Maitreyi thought to herself: 'Is it possible to be perpetually happy by possession of material comfort and property? If I am the owner of the entire earth and the wealth of the whole world is mine, will I be perpetually happy, or will there be some other factor which will intrude upon my happiness?' So, Maitreyi asked Yajnavalkya: 'If indeed the whole earth, full of wealth, belonged

to me, would I be immortal through that?' Yajnavalkya knew that one cannot be happy with wealth and possessions. One will be very comfortable, as is the case with people who own a lot of wealth, but one would be in the same state in other respects. Immortality is not possible through wealth and possessions. So he replied: 'No, your life would be just like that of people who have plenty. Of Immortality, however, there is no hope through wealth.'<sup>5</sup> Once a rich man approached Swami Niranjanananda for a cure for insomnia and he tried to help that poor man. However, he realised in his heart of hearts that even with plenty of riches one could still be suffering from insomnia.<sup>6</sup>

### Futility of Enjoyment

In the *Katha Upanishad* we have an illuminating dialogue between Nachiketa and Yama, the god of death, which reveals the futility of enjoyment. As the last of the three boons granted by Yama to Nachiketa, Nachiketa prayed for knowing whether anything imperishable and distinct from the perishable body exists after death or not. Yama first pointed out that this is not an easily comprehensible matter even by gods because it was subtle. Nachiketa was not to be put off so easily. On the very grounds that gods too had doubts in this matter, and that the matter was subtle, Nachiketa argued that Yama being a competent instructor should instruct him regarding this. Yama then tried to lure Nachiketa with

**B**ut you should remember that the heart of the devotee is the abode of God. He dwells, no doubt, in all beings, but He especially manifests Himself in the heart of the devotee. A landlord may at one time or another visit all parts of his estate, but people say he is generally to be found in a particular drawing-room. The heart of the devotee is the drawing-room of God.—*Gospel*, 133.



various tempting offers: Sons and grandsons who will be centenarians, animals, elephants, horses, gold, jewels, and the like and a vast expanse of the earth to rule for as many years as Nachiketa liked. He also offered physical fitness to enjoy all delectable and cherished things. He offered women with chariots and musical instruments. However, Nachiketa brushed aside all these offers with just a few pointed observations: All these are ephemeral. They waste away the vigour of the senses. All life without exception is short. Man is not to be satisfied with wealth, and music, disport and the joy thereof are worthless in comparison to higher goals sought by discriminating people.

In this connection one is reminded of the great king Yayati who, after enjoying lust for his

whole life span, borrowed the lifespan of his son for further enjoyment and came to the final conclusion: '*Na jatu kamah kamanam-upabhogena shamyati, havisha krishna-vartmeva bhuya eva abhivardhate*'; lusty desires are not pacified by enjoyment of lusty desires; they burn again all the more just as when clarified butter is offered into the fire.'<sup>7</sup> This is anyone's experience.

### **Effectiveness of Self-Knowledge**

Self-knowledge is the knowledge of the Imperishable referred to in the *Mundaka Upanishad* which Nachiketa of the *Katha Upanishad* was insisting upon, and this knowledge of the Reality has to be put into practice for the global uplift of the masses and women, to bring into existence

*The Room at Dakshineswar where Sri Ramakrishna Performed Vedanta Sadhana*





a glorious human civilisation. Swami Vivekananda says: 'The soul is infinite, omnipotent, and omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself, proclaim the God within you, do not deny Him! ... De-hypnotise yourselves. ... Teach yourselves, teach every one his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.'<sup>8</sup>

We have the Yajnavalkya-Maitreyi dialogue in which Yajnavalkya says to Maitreyi: 'Verily, not for the sake of the husband, my dear, is the husband loved, but he is loved for the sake of the self which, in its true nature, is one with the Supreme Self'. In this manner he speaks about the love for the wife, children, wealth, animals, brahmin, *kshatriya*, worlds, gods, Vedas, all beings, in fact all existence. He concludes by saying: '*Atma va are drashtavya shrotavyo mantavyo nididhyasitavyah*'; verily, my dear Maitreyi, it is the Self that should be realised—should be heard of, reflected on and meditated upon. By the realisation of the Self, my dear, through hearing, reflection and meditation, all this is known.'<sup>9</sup>

An interesting observation is made in the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*: '*Yatrahi dvaitamiva bhavati, tad itara itaram jighrati, tad itara itaram pashyati, tad itara itaram shrinoti, tad itara itaram abhivadati, tad itara itaram manute, tad itara itaram vijanati*'; when there is duality, as it were, then one smells another, one sees another, one hears another, one speaks to another, one thinks of another, one knows another'. '*Yatra va asya sarvam atmaivabhut, tatra kena kam jighret, tatra kena kam pashyet, tatra kena kam shrinuyat, tatra kena kam abhivadet, tatra kena kam manvita, tatra kena kam vijaniyat, yena sarvam idam vijanati tam kena vijaniyat, vijnataram arey kena vijaniyat*'; but when everything has become the Self, then what should one

smell and through what, what should one see and through what, what should one hear and through what, what should one speak and through what, what should one think and through what, what should one know and through what; through what should One know That owing to which all this is known, through what, my dear, should one know the Knower?' (2.4.14).

What is the advantage of gaining unitary vision? The Upanishads answer: '*Mṛityoh sa mṛityum prapnoti ya iha naneva pashyati*'; he goes from death to death who sees multiplicity here.'<sup>10</sup> '*Yasminsarvani bhutanyatmaivabhudvijanatah. tatra ko mohah kah shoka ekatvamanupashyatah*'; 'he who perceives all beings as the Self, for him how can there be delusion or grief, when he sees this oneness (everywhere)?'<sup>11</sup> '*Tarati shokam atmavit*, the knower of Atman crosses over sorrow'. '*Yo va etadaksharam gargyaviditvasmallokatpraiti sa kripanah, atha ya etadaksharam gargi viditvasmallokatpraiti sa brahmanah*'; he, O Gargi, who departs from this world without knowing this Immutable, is miserable. But he, O Gargi, who departs from this world after knowing this Immutable, is a knower of Brahman.'<sup>12</sup>

Why should an intelligent human being, in the light of this understanding, waste one's precious life running after secular knowledge which cannot remove sorrow, amass wealth and possession which cannot give immortality, and go crazy after worldly enjoyments which while dragging the mind away from the Self, are ephemeral and result only in the loss of vigour of the senses? The

It is all a question of the mind. Bondage and liberation are of the mind alone. The mind will take the colour you dye it with. ... Haven't you noticed that, if you read a little English, you at once begin to utter English words: Foot fut it mit? Then you put on boots and whistle a tune, and so on. It all goes together.—*Gospel*, 138.



Western Side of Sri Ramakrishna's Room

problem is this: while we boast about knowing much about things surrounding us very near, even within us, and even far away as the distant galaxies, we do not know the Self which lies hidden in us. This is our tactical error for which we are paying a heavy price.

### **Philosophy: Vedanta or Jnana Yoga**

*Jiva*, *jagat*, and *ishvara* are the three aspects which philosophical speculations address. *Jiva* means the embodied being, which expression itself implies that there is something, the Atman, which gets an embodiment; and by stating that of all such births, birth as a human being is the grandest, the idea conveyed is that the Atman takes on embodiment in various forms, not only human.

The Vedanta philosophy acknowledges the following six classes of evidence: (a) *Pratyaksha*,

direct perception. (b) *Anumana*, inference: agreement by presence; if *x* is there, *y* is there too. Agreement by absence; if *x* is not there, *y* too is not there. And both agreements by presence and absence. Then *x* is the cause and *y* is the effect. (c) *Upamana*, analogy. (d) *Shabda*, scriptural statement. (e) *Arthapatti*, presumption. (f) *Anupalabdhi*, privation. The evidence furnished by the Upanishads falls under the *shabda pramana*.

The preliminary questions, *anubandhas*, of the Vedanta are the determination of the competency of the student, the subject-matter, its connection with the book, and the necessity for its study.

The competent student, *adbhikari*, is an aspirant who, by studying in accordance with the prescribed method the Vedas and the *Vedangas*, has obtained a general comprehension of the entire Vedas, who being absolved from all sins in this or in a previous birth by the avoidance of the actions known as *kamyas*—rites performed with a view to attaining a desired object—and *nishiddhas*, those forbidden in the scriptures, and by the performance of actions called *nitya*, daily obligatory rites, and *naimittika*, rites obligatory on special occasions, as well as by penance and devotion, has become entirely pure in mind, and who has adopted the four sadhanas, *sadhana-chatushstaya*, or means to the attainment of spiritual knowledge.

The four means to the attainment of knowledge are:

a) *nitya-anitya-vastu-viveka*, discrimination between things permanent and transient: 'Brahman alone is the permanent substance and that all things other than it are transient.'

b) *ihā-amutra-phala-bhoga-viragah*, renunciation of the enjoyment of the fruits of actions in this world and hereafter, such as immortality. 'And as here on earth, whatever has been acquired by exertion perishes, so perishes whatever is acquired for the next world by sacrifices and other good actions performed on earth.'<sup>13</sup>

c) six treasures, *shama-adi-shat-sampattih*, such as control of the mind, and the like, and,

d) the desire for freedom, *mumukshatvam*.

Without discrimination, renunciation is impossible. Without renunciation, the acquisition of the six treasures is impossible. Without the acquisition of the six treasures, desire for liberation does not arise. When an aspirant is equipped with the three above-mentioned sadhanas, one cannot but have a strong desire for liberation. Then alone does one become fit to receive the absolute knowledge from the spiritual guide.

The six treasures are as follows: 1) *Shama*, the curbing of the mind from all objects except hearing of scriptures, thinking of their meaning and meditating on it. 2) *Dama* is the restraining of the external organs of action and knowledge from all objects except hearing, and the like. 3) *Uparati* is the restraining of the mind from drifting back to the pursuit of the objects of the senses other than hearing and the like, or it may mean the abandonment of the prescribed works, *sannyasa*, according to scriptural injunctions. 4) *Titiksha* is the endurance of the pairs of opposites, that is, being unruffled by pleasure and pain, arising from heat and cold, respect and contumely, gain and loss, weal and woe, and so on, which are the inevitable associates of the body, by meditating on the pure Self, which is always free from these dual throngs. 'The bearing of all afflictions without caring to redress them, being free from anxiety or lament on their score, is called *titiksha* or forbearance.'<sup>14</sup> 5) *Samadhana* is the constant concentration of the mind, on hearing and the like, of the scriptural passages and other objects such as modesty, humility, the service of the guru, compiling of the Vedantic books, their preservation, and so on. 6) *Shrad-dha* is the faith in the words of Vedanta as taught by the guru. A spiritual practice without faith does not produce the requisite effect.

Coming to the other three *anubandhas*, the subject-matter is the identity of the individual self or Atman and Brahman, which is of the nature of pure intelligence, which is to be realised; its connection with the book being that the book is the revealer of that identity between the Atman and Brahman which is to be realised; and the necessity for its study is the dispelling of the ignorance, *ajnana-nivrittih*, regarding this identity with a consequent total removal of misery, *atyantika duhkha-nivrittih*, and attainment of total bliss, *paramasukha prapti*.

### The Dialogue Between the Disciple and the Guru

Both the *Vedantasara* and the *Vivekachudamani* give picturesque descriptions of the outpouring of a sincere disciple in great distress when he meets his prospective generous guru filled with great compassion.

The *Vedantasara* says that a qualified pupil scorched with the fire of an endless round of birth, death, and the like, should repair with presents in hand, to a spiritual guide, learned in the Vedas and ever living in Brahman—just as one with one's head on fire rushes to a lake—and serve him.<sup>15</sup>

Instruction from a proper teacher is absolutely necessary for the knowledge of Brahman. Acharya Shankara in his commentary on the *Mundaka Upanishad* says: 'One though versed in the scriptures, should not search independently after the knowledge of Brahman' (ibid.). The qualifications of a spiritual teacher are, says the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*: 'One

If a man repeats the name of God, his body, mind, and everything become pure. Why should one talk only about sin and hell, and such things? Say but once, 'O Lord, I have undoubtedly done wicked things, but I won't repeat them.' And have faith in His name. —Gospel, 138.



who is learned in the Vedas, without sin and not overcome by desire.<sup>16</sup> The *Chhandogya Upanishad* says: 'A man who has accepted a teacher obtains the true Knowledge.'<sup>17</sup> With fuel in hand is indicative of the spirit of humility and service with which a disciple should approach his teacher.

The picture sketched by *Vivekachudamani* is even grander and highly revealing: A person with requisite qualifications who wants to realise the truth about Atman should *humbly* approach a guru, who is well-versed in the scriptures, is sinless, is free from desire, and is a super-eminent knower of Brahman, who having withdrawn into himself is ever at peace. Worshipping such a guru with devotion and humility, he should say:

My Master! I bow to you. You are the friend to those who make obeisance to you. You are the ocean of compassion. I have fallen into the sea of *samsara*. Bathe me in the nectar of your compassionate look and save me from the depths of this ocean. I am scorched by the inextinguishable forest-fire of *samsara*. I am deeply shaken by the winds of misfortune. I am overcome by intense fear. I fall at your feet. Save me from death. I have none else in whom I can seek refuge.<sup>18</sup>

His prayer is an earnest appeal issuing spontaneously from the depth of his heart. The disciple continues: 'Your speech sweetened by the ambrosial bliss of Brahman is immensely cooling. It is delightful to the ear. Sprinkle your cool words on my head' (38–9). The guru having

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himself crossed over the ocean of *samsara* understands the condition of the disciple, is full of compassion and intent on helping others for no reason of their own, says: 'Fear not. There is no danger to you. There is a means to cross the ocean of *samsara*. I shall show you the way by which those who have striven in the past have reached the other shore' (43). How consoling and refreshing these words are! The aspirant immediately places himself under the guidance of such a guru.

### Creation of Jiva and Jagat by Ishvara

The *Panchadashi* gives a portrayal of the creation of the *jiva* and *jagat*:

*Prakriti*, the primordial power, is that in which there is the reflection of Brahman, that is, pure consciousness and bliss, and is composed of *sattva*, serenity; *rajas*, activity; and *tamas*, inertia, in a state of homogeneity. It is of two kinds: a) When the element of *sattva* is pure, *prakriti* is known as *maya*; b) when impure, being mixed up with *rajas* and *tamas*, it is called *avidya*.

Brahman, reflected in *maya*, is known as the omniscient *ishvara*, who controls *maya*. But the other, the *jiva*, which is Brahman reflected in *avidya*, is subjected to *avidya*, impure *sattva*, mixed up with *rajas* and *tamas*. The *jiva* is of different grades due to degrees of admixture of *rajas* and *tamas* with *sattva*. The *avidya*, nescience, is the causal body. When the *jiva* identifies itself with this causal body, *karana sharira*, it is called *prajna*, literally, almost ignorant, unlike the *ishvara* who is omniscient.

At the command of *ishvara* and for the experience of *prajna*, the five subtle elements, ether, air, fire, water and earth, arose from the part of *prakriti* in which *tamas* predominates.

From the *sattva* part of the five subtle elements of *prakriti* arose in turn the five subtle *sensory organs* of hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell. From a combination of them all, that

is, *sattva* portions of the five subtle elements, arose the organ of inner conception called *antahkarana*. Due to difference of function it is divided into two: *manas*, mind is that aspect whose function is doubting, and *buddhi*, intellect, is that whose functions are discrimination and determination.

From the *rajas* portion of the five elements arose in turn the organs of actions known as the organ of speech, the hands, the feet, and the organs of excretion, and generation. From a combination of them all, that is, the *rajas* portions of the five subtle elements, arose the vital air, *prana*. Again, due to difference of function it is divided into five: *prana*, *apana*, *samana*, *udana*, and *vyana*.

The five sensory organs, the five organs of action, the five vital airs, mind, and intellect—all the seventeen together from the subtle body, which is called the *sukshma* or *linga sharira*.

By identifying itself with the subtle body and thinking it to be its own *prajna* becomes known as *taijasa*, and *ishvara* as *hiranyagarbha*. *Ishvara* as *hiranyagarbha*, is called totality or collective because of his sense of identification with *all* the subtle bodies of the universe. The other, the *taijasa* is called 'individual' because it lacks this knowledge and is conscious *only* of its self, being identified with its own subtle body.

### Panchikarana

To provide the *jivas* with objects of enjoyment, eventually to gain knowledge and make the

The worldly man is like the typhoid patient. The various objects of enjoyment are the huge jug of water, and the craving for their enjoyment is his thirst. The very thought of pickles makes the mouth water; you don't have to bring them near. And he is surrounded with them. The companionship of woman is the pickles. Hence treatment in solitude is necessary.—*Gospel*, 140.



bodies fit for such enjoyment, the all-powerful *ishvara* has made each of the subtle elements partake of the nature of all others: Dividing each subtle element into two equal halves and one half of each again into four equal parts, the *ishvara* mixed the subtle elements so that each gross element thus formed should contain one half of its own peculiar nature and one eighth of that of each of the other four. This is called *panchikarana* or quintuplication. At that time ether manifests sound; air manifests sound and touch; fire manifests sound, touch and form; water manifests sound, touch, form, and taste; and earth manifests sound, touch, form, taste, and smell. From these compounded elements have evolved fourteen planes, the world, and four kinds of gross bodies contained in it together with their food and drink.

When *hiranyagarbha* identifies itself with the totality of gross bodies it is known as *vaishvanara*; when *taijasa*s do so with individual gross bodies of the gods, men, or lower animals—they are known as *vishvas*. They see only external things and are devoid of the knowledge of their true inner nature. They perform actions for enjoyment and again they enjoy for performing action. They go from birth to birth ‘as worms that have slipped into a river are swept from one whirlpool to another and never attain peace’.<sup>19</sup> This is the simile. When the good deeds performed by them in past births bear fruit, then, just as ‘the worms enjoy rest being lifted from the river by a compassionate person and placed under the shade of a tree on the bank’ (1.31), even so the *jivas*, finding themselves in the whirlpool of *samsara*, receive the appropriate initiation

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from a teacher who himself has realised Brahman, and differentiating the Self from its five sheaths attain the supreme bliss of release.

### **Anvaya and Vyatireka in Vedanta**

These two words, *anvaya*, invariable factor, and *vyatireka*, variable factor, occur often in Vedanta, particularly in the *Panchadashi*.

By differentiating the Self from the five sheaths through the method of distinguishing between the variable, *vyatireka*, and the invariable, *anvaya*, one can draw out one's own Self from the five sheaths and attain the supreme Brahman.

The physical body present in one's consciousness in the waking state is absent in the dreaming state, but the witnessing element, pure consciousness, persists in both the waking and dreaming states. This is the invariable presence, *anvaya*, of the Self. Though the Self is perceived, the physical body is not, in the dreaming state; so the latter is a variable, *vyatireka*, factor.

Similarly, in the state of deep sleep, the subtle body is not perceived, but the Self invariably witnesses that state of deep sleep. While the Self persists in all states, the subtle body is not perceived in deep sleep and so it is called a variable, *vyatireka*, factor. By discrimination of the subtle body, and recognition of its variable, transient character, the sheaths of the mind, intellect, and vital airs are understood to be different from the Self, for the sheaths are conditions of the three gunas, and differ from each other, qualitatively and quantitatively.

*Avidya*, manifested as the causal body of bliss sheath, is negated in the state of deep meditation, in which neither subject nor object is experienced, but the Self persists in that state; so the Self is the invariable factor. But the causal body is a variable factor, for though the Self persists, it does not.

As the slender, internal pith of *munja* grass

can be detached from its coarse external covering, so the Self can be distinguished through reasoning from the three bodies, *karana* or causal, *sukshma* or subtle, and *sthula* or gross, or the five sheaths—*annamaya* or physical, *pranamaya* or vital, *manomaya* or mental, *vijnanamaya* or intellectual, and *anandamaya* or blissful. Then the Self is recognised as the supreme consciousness.

In this way the identity of Brahman and *jiva* is demonstrated through reasoning. This identity is taught in the sacred texts in sentences such as 'That thou art'. Their method of explaining the truth, *bhaga-lakshana*, is through the elimination of incongruous attributes.

The *jnanis* discriminate, following the method of '*neti, neti*; not this, not this'. Brahman is not the five elements, nor the sense-organs, nor the mind, nor the intelligence, nor the ego. Brahman is beyond all these cosmic principles. What are the grounds on the basis of which all these are eliminated? There are a few litmus tests for *anatman*, that which is not the Atman. These are: 1) being gross, 2) being possessed, 3) being an aggregate of parts, 4) being compacted of gunas, 5) being impure, 6) not existing in all the three periods of time, namely, past, present, and future, and being subject to modification; 7) delimited by space, time, and objects; 8) seen now and later not seen, that is, it is of *drishta-nashta-svabhava*; 9) produced, *kritaka*, that is, it is an effect; 10) the known and not the knower; 11) it is ruled, not the ruler; and 12) it is dependent, not self-subsistent.<sup>20</sup>

One may enter the world after attaining discrimination and dispassion. In the ocean of the world there are six alligators: lust, anger, and so forth. But you need not fear the alligators if you smear your body with turmeric before you go into the water. Discrimination and dispassion are the turmeric. —*Gospel*, 140.

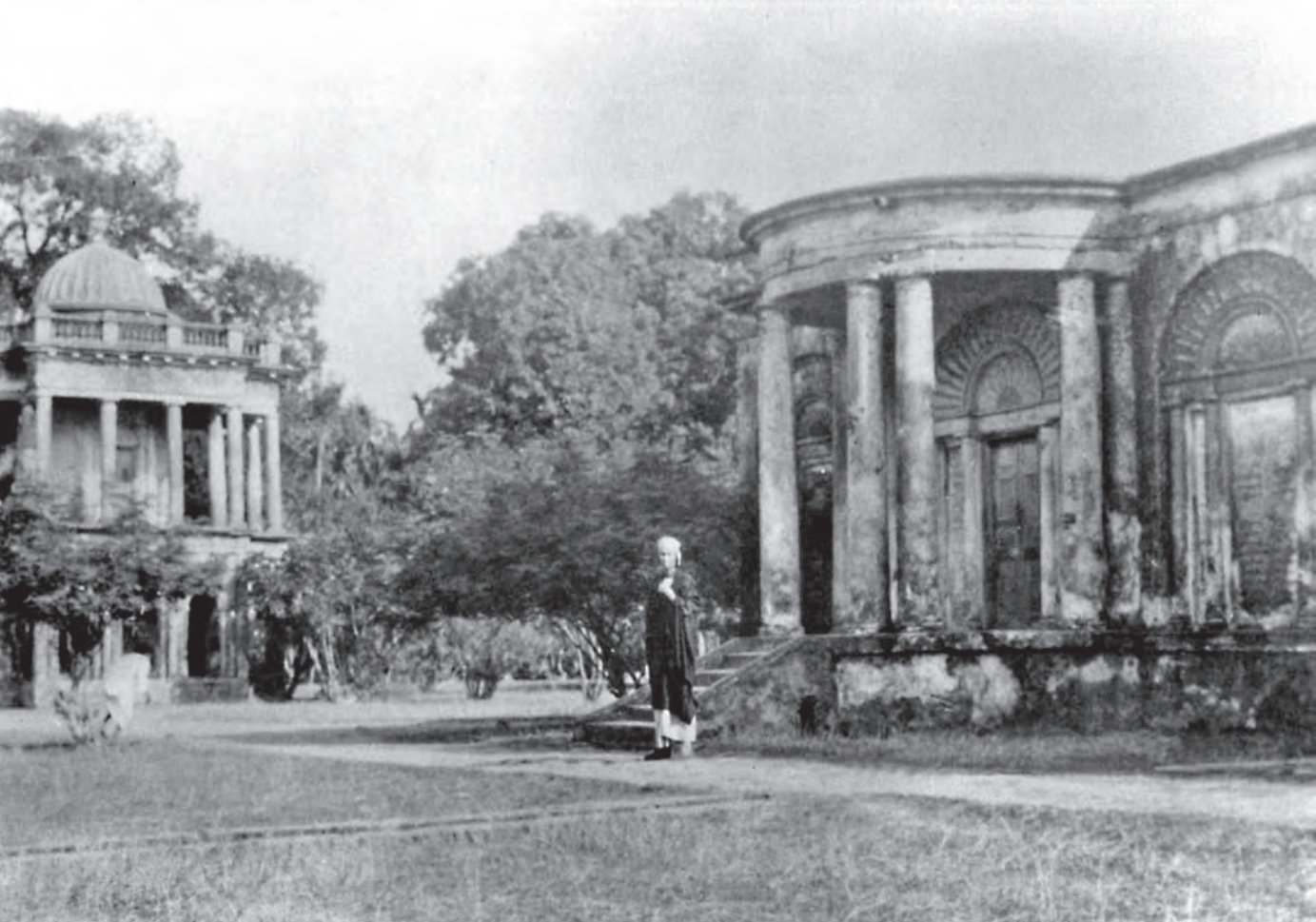
Likewise Brahman and this *jagat* have differences, to mention a few: *nityo'nityanam*, Brahman is eternal among non-eternals; *chet-anashchetananam*, Brahman is consciousness in things endowed with consciousness; and *ekobahunam*, Brahman is the one among many. On what basis does variety exist in that which is One? It is because of *bheda*, differentiation. Differentiation can be of three types: *svagata*, differences within itself as in the case of a trunk, branch, leaves, fruits, flowers, and so on of a tree; *sajatiya*, differences within the same species as in the case of several trees of the same type, several mango trees, for example; or *vijatiya*, differences between objects of a different species as in the case of a mango tree, a lemon tree, a coconut tree, and so on. Thus multiplicity comes about through *bheda*. And creation returns to the one existence

by elimination of the differences, *bhedas*. It is love that unites and love is the basis of removal of all perception of *bhedas*. The attraction of a rich person for one's wealth is an example of elimination of *vijatiya bheda*; of a husband for his chaste wife is an example of elimination of *sajatiya bheda*; and of a mother for her child is an example of elimination of *svagata bheda*. By a combination of these types of attractions and directing to God or Brahman, all *bhedas* are eliminated.

### Perception

One picture of perception is pointed out by *Vedantasara*. In the case of the experience 'this is a jar', the mental state assumes the form of the jar, makes the unknown jar its object, and dispels the ignorance regarding it. Then the consciousness underlying the mental state manifests the

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material jar. Thus it has been said: 'Both the intellect and the consciousness underlying it come into contact with the jar. The intellect destroys the ignorance regarding the jar and the underlying consciousness manifests the jar.'<sup>21</sup>

Objects like gems created by *ishvara* do not alter; they remain the same. But gems may affect different people differently according to their mental states. One person may feel happy on obtaining a gem, whereas another may feel disappointed at failing to obtain it. And a person uninterested in it may only look on and feel neither happy nor disappointed. The *jiva* creates these three feelings of happiness, disappointment, or indifference with regard to the gem, but the nature of the gem as created by *ishvara* remains the same throughout (4.20-2).

There are two kinds of objects mentioned here: the 'material' and the 'mental'. The 'material' object is cognised by the mind, getting modified by the form of the material object. And the 'mental' object is cognised by the witness-consciousness, as the *jiva* by evoking its latent desire for enjoyment. It is the 'mental' object which causes bondage to the *jiva*, for when these 'mental' objects are there, pleasure and pain are also there; when they are not, there is neither pleasure nor pain (4.30-1). It is the mental image which is good or evil, and hence one cannot logically keep out evil and grant entry to good alone.

So too is the case with the organs of action which are directed by the intellect along nerve channels of communication to perform their actions. So every evil action definitely has its impact on those who get affected by it, which is well known, as well as on those who happen to be the unfortunate source of this action. For example, if we speak something hurtful, the listener gets hurt and equally we too who are present at the scene. As the Holy Mother said, if we speak ill of another, we have to have a share in it as well. And

so even in performing action, extreme control is to be exercised.

### **Spread of Evil**

By accepting whatever comes in through the sense-instruments, we will be affected by the mere contact with that which is bad! It is said that a snake kills a person by injecting its venom, but a person can get ruined by merely coming into eye contact with the sense-objects.

As desire for sense-objects arises through sense organs coming into contact with the sense-objects, the mind thinking about them, and the intellect by discrimination about them, the sense organs, mind, and intellect are said to be the seat of desire. If desire is not controlled, then the organs, the mind, and the intellect cover one's wisdom and delude the embodied being.<sup>22</sup>

In the Gita, Sri Krishna explains the process by which one goes to ruin by thinking of the sense-objects. He says: 'For a person thinking of the sense-objects, there grows attachment for them; from attachment arises desire; from desire results anger; from anger results delusion; from delusion results confusion of memory; from confusion of memory results destruction of intelligence; and from destruction of intelligence he perishes' (2.62-3).

In the *Katha Upanishad*, Yama, the god of death, distinguishes between two human goals: the *pleasurable* and the *preferable*. All men are impelled by these two goals<sup>23</sup> under an idea of personal duty; for, according as one hankers after

**D**o you know what a worldly person endowed with *sattva* is like? Perhaps his house is in a dilapidated condition here and there. He doesn't care to repair it. ... He doesn't care for dress at all; anything is good enough for him. But the man himself is very gentle, quiet, kind, and humble; he doesn't injure anyone. —*Gospel*, 146.



prosperity or immortality, one engages in the pleasurable, leading to prosperity on earth and in heaven, or preferable, leading to immortality or freedom from the cycle of birth and death. Therefore, all persons are said to be bound by these two goals through the sense of duty with regard to what leads to the pleasurable or the preferable. Good befalls the intelligent person who chooses the preferable; and ill befalls the short-sighted one of poor intellect who runs after the pleasurable.

The *Katha Upanishad* lists an ascending gradation of subtleness, commencing from senses as the grossest, and ending with *purusha* or Self as the subtlest: senses, sense-objects, mind, intellect, *mahat*, *hiranyagarbha*, unmanifested, *maya*, *purusha*—that is the sequence (1.3.10–1). There is nothing subtler than the *purusha*, which is the culmination and the highest goal. Had the senses turned towards the *purusha* or Self,

and not got stuck up with the pleasure-giving and prosperity-bestowing sense-objects, it would have been wiser. As the *Katha Upanishad* reveals: ‘The self-existent Lord destroyed the outgoing senses. Therefore, one sees the outer things and not the inner Self. A rare discriminating person, desiring immortality, turns one eyes away and then sees the indwelling Self (2.1.1).

There are a few blessed persons who see evil in running after the sense-objects as stated above in the Gita, and withdraw their senses from the sense-objects for the purpose of attaining immortality, seeing the impermanence of the sense-objects and their destroying the vigour of all the senses.

The *Katha Upanishad* gives the illustration of two birds on the self-same tree of this *samsara*. The upper bird sits calmly enjoying its own glory while the lower bird, which is but a reflection of the bird above jumps from one branch to another

Kuthi Badi at Dakshineswar



eating the fruits on the tree. It enjoys the sweet fruits but when it comes across a bitter fruit it gets upset and frustrated. It then looks at the upper bird and giving up this running after enjoyments moves closer to the upper bird and finally merges in it. Thus nature is not for the enjoyment of the jiva but for educating it in renunciation.

It is stated in the Gita:

And when one completely withdraws one senses from the sense-objects, even as a tortoise its limbs, then one's wisdom is steady. From an abstemious embodied being, sense-objects fall off, but not the relish for them; but even the relish of the man of steady wisdom ceases when that supreme Being is realised. The turbulent senses, O son of Kunti, forcibly lead astray the mind of even the struggling wise person. Controlling all these senses, the self-controlled one should sit meditating on Me, the Lord. Verily, his wisdom is steady, whose senses are under control. Whichever of the wandering senses the mind follows, that one carries away his wisdom as the wind a ship on the sea.<sup>24</sup>

Instead of meditating on sense-objects which leads to total destruction, one should meditate on the Self within for liberation. The intellect should control the sense organs with the help of the mind; then the sense organs will not lead a person astray.

### **Containing the Spread of Vitiating into the Human System**

The sense organs, mind, and intellect get clouded by being in constant touch with the sense-objects. However, there is the Atman, which is beyond contamination. Hence, it is possible to purify the intellect, the mind, and the sense-organs. The procedure is called *jnana-tapas*, fire of knowledge, by dwelling on the ever pure Self, with the intellect controlling the mind, and the mind controlling the senses. 'By an unceasing establishment in the Atman, *atma-vasana*, there arises stilling

of the mind, *mano-nasha*, for the yogis and the decline of *vasanas*, *vasana-kshaya*. Hence, bring about the removal of superimposition, *adhyasa-apanayam kuru*, of other things on you.'<sup>25</sup>

### **Stages in Self-Control**

For the beginner, being totally aloof from evil is preferable. One has then to deal only with the latent impressions in the mind which now and then surfaces. It is safe but cannot be made practical. The next stage is when one can allow some leniency towards sense-objects taking care that we may be at best singed but not burnt. After years of persistent self-control, a stage will be reached as the result of *jnana-tapas*, fire of knowledge, when, becoming pure, no external stimulus will disturb us.

Even after the Atman is known, impressions such as 'I am the doer, I am the enjoyer', which are the cause of *samsara*, are very strong. This has to be removed with effort by living in a state of turning the eyes inward as said in the *Katha Upanishad*. What are the obstructions to remaining in the Atman with an inward vision? The false identification with the body and the organs, prana, *manas*, and *buddhi*, which leads to a sense of 'I' and 'mine'. *Vivekachudamani* states:

True wisdom never arises:

1) to a person who acts in consonance with what the people of the world will say, *lokavasana*, for it is impossible to please everyone.

**A**gain, among the worldly there are people with the traits of *rajas*. Such a man has a watch and chain, and two or three rings on his fingers. The furniture of his house is all spick and span. On the walls hang portraits of the Queen, the Prince of Wales, and other prominent people; the building is whitewashed and spotlessly clean. His wardrobe is filled with a large assortment of clothes.

—Gospel, 146.



2) to a person who is concerned about his knowledge of the scriptures, *shastravasana*. This consists of: a) Difficulty of learning, *pathavyasana*; try as one might it is not possible to 'complete one's study'. b) Incompetency for *shastra*, *shastravyasana*; carry as many scriptures as one might, it will be like an ass carrying a load; *atmavidya* does not accrue to one without inward vision and the grace of the guru. c) Difficulty of observance, *anushthanavyasana*; unable to find a place pure enough to practise austerities, one simply roams about. This group of *vasanas* has to be dealt with by understanding that the one thing to learn is *adhyatma-vidya*, and to put all one's effort in this direction by trying to develop inward vision with faith in oneself and the guru.

3) to one who is subject to delusion about

the body, *dehavasana* by mistaking the body for the Atman and ignoring its evil qualities, and delusion (272).

Those who have attained knowledge of Brahman say that for those who wish to obtain release from the prison of *samsara*, the above three strong *vasanas* are iron fetters binding their legs! One who is freed from them attains liberation (273).

### **How to get rid of the Dehavasana**

The culture of *atmavasana* is the effective means for getting rid of the *vasanas* (274). To the extent to which the mind is turned and established inward, it gives up the external *vasanas*. When all the *vasanas* are completely extinguished, the experience of Brahman is free from all obstacles.

*Pancha-Mundi Asana, the Place of Sri Ramakrishna's Tantra Sadhana*





By preventing the operation of the effect, the cause must be destroyed. If the tree is destroyed, it can no more give seeds for further trees. This is one principle. Equally true is that if the cause is not there, the effect will not also be there. If the seed itself is worm-eaten, it will not even sprout. This is a second principle. Delusion is the effect; *vasanas* are the cause. By unceasing establishment in the Atman, preventing the operation of delusion or the mistaking of the non-Atman for the Atman, there arises *manonasha*, stilling of the mind, and the decline of the *vasanas*. This is the way to destroy all wrong superimpositions—*sva-adhyasa-apanayam kuru*—the idea of the Atman in the five *koshas* (278–6). To bring about a great disgust for the body, it is highlighted that from the union of the reproductive fluids from one's parents one gets a body which again is filled with excreta and flesh; hence it is only filth considering its origin and nature.

The greatest obstacle for the practice of *Atmavasana* is forgetfulness, which has been declared to be equivalent to one's death.<sup>26</sup> The causes of forgetfulness are four: mind by its very nature is forgetful, sleep, gossip, and sense-objects.<sup>27</sup> *Vivekachudamani* makes a fervent call to give up identification with one's family, clan, name, form, and station in life which are all associated with the body (298). Similarly, it urges us to give up the qualities of the subtle body like agency, and other qualities also, *bhava akhanda sukha svarupah* (297).

### Ahamkara

The root and first modification of *ajnana* is *ahamkara*. *Vivekachudamani* classes *ahamkara* as a *duratman*, a wicked one (300). The intellect lacking in understanding, being clouded by the darkness of *ajnana*, thinks that 'I' refers to that *ahamkara* and not the Atman. This is because such an intellect does not have the capacity

to know the nature of Atman. Only when that *ahamkara* and the various wrong ideas produced from it, are destroyed without a trace that the sense of identity of Brahman and the Atman is devoid of any hindrance.

*Vivekachudamani* gives an apt analogy: The treasure of the bliss of Brahman is guarded by a very powerful terrible serpent called *ahamkara* coiling round it with its three fierce hoods: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The wise one should cut asunder the three heads with the great and sharp sword of wisdom and, destroying this serpent, enjoy this treasure which makes for bliss (303). *Tamas* is destroyed by *sattva*, poetic works, study of scriptures, or entertainment; and *rajas*, exercise and so, on; *rajas* by *sattva* in the form of *sattvik* activities involving concentration of the mind; and *sattva*, even *jnana* which is a transformation brought about by *sattva* is destroyed, by pure *nirguna* Brahman (278). Recall the story of three robbers mentioned by Sri Ramakrishna in which even *sattva* is regarded as a robber!<sup>28</sup> So too, Sri Krishna asks Arjuna to be free from the three qualities, *nistraigunya*.<sup>29</sup> When *ahamkara* is destroyed, its effect, namely, delusion will also be destroyed, and freed from *ajnana*, one gets the direct perception of the truth, 'I am Brahman'.

*Vivekachudamani* gives a strong word of caution: Like the cloud suddenly brought in by the wind in the rainy season, if this *ahamkara*, even though completely rooted out, is awakened in the mind even for a moment, coming to life again, it creates hundreds of perplexities! This awakening of *ahamkara*, which has been rooted out, as it were, is brought about by thinking of the sense-objects, just as a decayed lemon tree comes to life again when it receives some water.<sup>30</sup> As to how the sense-objects become the cause of

The traits of a worldly man endowed with *tamas* are sleep, lust, anger, egotism, and the like.—*Gospel*, 146.



this revival of *ahamkara*, *Vivekachudamani* puts it in the language of the Gita (327–8). The joy given by sense-objects is for the mind and not for the Atman which is ever in bliss. Therefore, the thought of sense-objects results in forgetfulness of one's true nature; one thinks that *ahamkara* is the Atman. Without the sense of *ahamkara*, desire for the sense-objects will not arise. Because of *ahamkara* one further thinks that the mind, prana, body, intellect, and the like also as Atman.

*Vasana*, tendency is stimulated by thought or mental longing internally and by action externally. In the context of sense-objects it is said: '*Dridha-bhavanaya tyakta-purva-apara-vicharanam yad-adanam padarthasya vasana sa prakirtitah*'; that is called *vasana* which makes for spontaneous

recall of an object in the mind by previous intense thought of it and without reflection of its antecedent and consequent.<sup>31</sup> In the absence of *vasanas*, the sense-objects will not make for bondage. Otherwise, flaming brightly and without break by the fuel of *vasanas*, the fire of *manomaya-kosha* makes all human beings undeserving to attain liberation. The means to bring about the destruction of *vasana*, tendency, thought internally and action externally is the strengthening of the *vasana* of being Brahman, *sadbhava vasana*, everywhere and in all ways. Thus, *sadbhava vasana* is a sure antidote to *anatma vasana*.

When actions relating to sense-objects are destroyed, longing for sense-objects also ceases, and that will lead to annihilation of *vasana*. Some hold that this annulment of *vasana* is itself liberation. A terrible tiger called the mind wanders in the vast forest of sense-objects. Let not the good persons who seek liberation go there.<sup>32</sup> The idea is that sense-objects involving externalising of the mind are detrimental to those who seek liberation and so they are to be avoided like poison.

### **Arjuna's Dilemma: Karma Yoga**

When Arjuna sat down in his chariot on the battlefield overcome by a state of despondency, Sri Krishna instructed him in true wisdom. Arjuna asked him if jnana were better than karma, why should he fight the war in which all his kith and kin were present before him to fight, out of greed for kingdom and throne. It is better to take to sannyasa rather than fight this destructive war. Realising that the path of jnana was not within the comprehension of his friend Arjuna, and that he was leaning towards sannyasa which is not the dharma of a *kshatriya*, Sri Krishna talked about the way of action.

The Gita advises: 'Perform the prescribed duties; for action is superior to inaction; moreover, if you are inactive, even the maintenance

of your body will be impossible.<sup>33</sup> Also, even if there is no need to perform actions as in the case of God or great persons like King Janaka and others, as well as those who delight in the Self, they should work as an incentive for people (3.20). For, if a respectable person shuns work, others will follow that example and become lazy.

There is such a thing as dexterity in the performance of actions. Plunge into actions, but after knowing the secret of action which is to perform actions disinterestedly, all the while considering the work to be of prime importance and looking upon oneself as the only person left on whose endeavour the success of the undertaking depends. What is achieved by the performance of unselfish actions? One develops *chitta-shuddhi*, purity of the mind. Apart from the straightforward implication that purity of mind means that there are no impure thoughts, that there is no place for objects of the senses, it also means that there is no selection between the pairs of duality often indicated by the pairs: joy and sorrow, gain and loss, victory and defeat, heat and cold. This latter meaning means that the mind is not perturbed by the fruits of actions which may be favourable or unfavourable. To such a mind, there being no selection based on the ultimate fruit of actions, the entire energy is fruitfully spent on the performance of actions without any distraction or looking back at the fruits themselves. To work one has the right but not to the fruits thereof. The mind does not vacillate. One can also perform actions and offer the fruits of action to God, who is the one who really motivates us and performs actions through us.

### **Place of Scriptural Study in Karma Yoga**

Whatever may be one's own nature, *sattvik*, *rajasik*, or *tamasik*, the discriminative knowledge taught by the scriptures is able to change that nature. Hence, one must learn and accept the

scriptural authority as regards the performance of work. 'Therefore, the scripture is your authority as regards the determination of what is to be done and what is not to be done. After understanding your duty as presented by scriptural injunctions, you ought to perform your duty here in this world of action' (16.24).

How to know the prescribed duties? Who prescribes the duties? The scriptures provide injunctions and prohibitions. If, from the scriptures, a person knows the injunctions and performs the prescribed duties then his faith is *sattvik* and that person is in possession of divine wealth which conduces for liberation (16.1-3, 5). On the other hand, if one acts against the scriptural injunctions, then that person is without faith and in possession of demoniac wealth, which conduces to repeated births and deaths. 'He who, setting aside the ordinances of the scriptures, acts under the impulse of desire, attains neither perfection nor happiness nor the supreme goal' (16.23).

There could be some persons, who do not strive to know the injunctions of the scriptures either from a sense of trouble, *rajasik* temperament or from sheer laziness, *tamasik* temperament, and by merely following family tradition occasionally worship some deity with faith. Their faith is threefold depending on their former nature which had not been modified by discriminative knowledge taught by the scriptures. In this situation, those alone with *sattvik* faith are fit for the realisation of truth and not those with *rajasik* or *tamasik* temperaments.

### **Four Castes Based on Three Gunas**

Sri Krishna states in the Gita that the four castes were God's creation: 'The four castes were created

**N**o one can say with finality that God is only 'this' and nothing else. —*Gospel*, 148.



by me according to differences in aptitudes and actions of people' (4.13). There are three gunas and out of these four castes were created as follows: The brahmanas have a preponderance of the sattva element, and their duties are the control of the mind and the external organs, and the like. The *kshatriyas* have sattva plus a preponderance of rajas, and their duties are courage, war, and the like. The Vaishyas have rajas plus a preponderance of tamas, and their duties are agriculture, trade, and so on. The shudras have a preponderance of tamas, and their duty consists in service, and the like, to the other three castes (18.41–4).

The duties of the brahmanas, kshatriyas, and vaishyas as also of the shudras, are clearly divided according to the dispositions born of their own nature (18.41). Of these, the natural duties of a brahmana are 'serenity, self-control, austerity, purity, forbearance, and also uprightness, knowledge, realisation, and faith' (18.42). The natural duties of a kshatriya are 'heroism, boldness, firmness, dexterity, not fleeing from the battle, generosity, and lordliness' (18.43). 'Agriculture, cattle-rearing, and trade are the duties of a vaishya born of one's nature; and work of the nature of service is the duty of a shudra born of one's nature' (18.44).

Because of being endowed with dullness, inertia, laziness, sleep, and the like, a person with tamas is only fit for the work of the nature of service; this is not to be misconstrued as social discrimination, because such person does not have

the requisite qualification for any other type of work in society, and if attempted, such person would be a failure, and she or he too has to be admitted as a member in society with some means for earning a livelihood. Today, we talk about attitude and aptitude for work, implying that all are not suited for every type of work. It is also to be noted that if a person of this type does not perform one's duty, the entire social fabric will fall to pieces, and people belonging to other categories will have to flee *en masse* for healthier pastures! So, in spite of the nature of one's work, a shudra is an important and indispensable member of society—as important as or sometimes even more important than the others. A king or a priest will fare poorly as a cobbler; and a cobbler too will fare poorly as a king or a priest.

And in and through the work one performs, everyone can attain liberation. How is that? 'Devoted to his own duty, a person attains perfection. Listen how one engaged in one's own duty attains perfection.' Thus says Sri Krishna in the Gita (18.45). Heartily engaged in, duty according to one's qualifications, a person attains perfection, fitness for knowledge. How duties of various types all lead to knowledge is being stated: 'Listen to that method by which, one sincerely engaged in one's own duty attains knowledge of the truth. ... From whom proceeds the activity of all beings, and by whom all this is pervaded, worshipping him through one's duty, a



IMAGE: RAMAKRISHNA MUSEUM, BELUR MATH

person attains perfection' (18.46). The activity of all proceed from the *ishvara* as the inner ruler, as the cause, all this universe is permeated, pervaded by him and by worshipping that *ishvara* through one's duty, everyone attains perfection. Thus, 'a human being achieves success by adoring through his own duties him from whom is the origin of creatures, and by whom is all this pervaded and sustained as well.'

It is the advice of sage Kapila to his mother Devahuti in the Bhagavata, that one should worship his image in all beings and then only in his images in temples. Those who worship God in images forgetting his presence in all beings are pouring oblations, as it were, into ashes instead of sacrificial fire.

### Devotion to God: Bhakti Yoga

Sri Krishna points out in the Gita that 'this divine maya of mine, which is constituted of the gunas is difficult to cross over, therefore those who take refuge in me alone cross over this maya' (7.14). This is the way of devotion to God. Where to find this God?

Sri Krishna points out where God is: 'Taking the form of *Vaishvanara* and residing in the bodies of creatures, I, in association with prana and *apana*, digest the four kinds of food. ... I am seated in the hearts of all. From me are memory, knowledge and their loss. I alone am the object to be known through all the Vedas; I am also the originator of the Vedanta, and I myself am the knower of Vedas' (15.14-5.)

Further in the Gita, we see the teaching: 'O Arjuna, the Lord resides in the region of the heart of all creatures, revolving through Maya all the creatures as though mounted on a machine! (18.61). As regards how strong and devastating sense-objects can be even for the wise one, during this merry-go-round ride, Sri Krishna says: 'For, O son of Kunti, the turbulent organs

violently snatch away the mind of an intelligent person while he is still striving diligently' (2.60). And also: 'For, the mind which follows in the wake of the wandering senses, that (mind) carries away his wisdom like the wind (diverting) a boat on the waters' (2.67).

This idea finds expression also in the *Chandi* aka *Devi Mahatmyam*, which says:

People are hurled into the whirlpool of attachment, the pit of delusion, through the power of *mahamaya*, the great illusion, who makes the existence of the world possible. ... This *mahamaya* is the *yoganidra*, of Vishnu, the Lord of the world. It is by her that the world is deluded. ... She, the Bhagavati, *mahamaya* forcibly drawing the minds of even the wise, throws them into delusion. She creates this entire universe, both moving and unmoving. It is She who, when propitious, becomes a boon-giver to human beings for their final liberation. She is supreme knowledge, the cause of final liberation, and eternal; She is the cause of the bondage of transmigration and the sovereign over all Lords.<sup>34</sup>

The way of devotion is like the father holding the hands of the child; there is no fear of a fall. When in difficulty, as Holy Mother says: 'Say to yourself, "I have a Mother"'.<sup>35</sup> Bhakti is the means and Bhakti is the goal. There is the *vaidhi* bhakti which consists of observances of worship, and so on, and there is also the *para* or *mukhya* bhakti which is the higher stage. In the lower stage jnana and bhakti appear different; but in the higher stage jnana and bhakti are identical.

In this method of devotion there is plenty of richness in thought and variety! While the way of knowledge lays down strict restriction on competency of the aspirant, the way of devotion is open for all.

**G**od reveals Himself in the form which His devotee loves most. His love for the devotee knows no bounds.  
—Gospel, 150.



There are several attitudes: *shanta*, serene; *dasya*, servant; *sakhya*, friend; *vatsalya*, child or parent; and *madhura*, love bhavas.

There are various levels of proximity with God: *salokya*, in the same plane as God; *samipya*, nearness to God; *sarupya*, of nearly the same form as God; *sarshti*, attaining opulence like God; *sayujya*, mergence with God.

There are the nine forms of devotional service: *Shravanam*, hearing God's names and about God's divine play; *kirtanam*, singing God's glories; *vishnoh*, of God; *smaranam*, remembering God's names and divine plays; *pada-sevanam*, serving the lotus feet of God; *archanam*, offering worship; *vandanam*, offering prayers and salutation; *dasyam*, serving as a servant; *sakhyam*, becoming a friend of God; and *atma-nivedanam*; surrendering everything unto God.

A devotee does not seek anything from his beloved except to serve God and God's created beings life after life. Therefore, if any devotee is able to serve the devotees of God, then such a person

is considered by God to be the best amongst devotees. A devotee accepts every situation as coming from his beloved; and does not ask *why* a situation arose in his life but tries to understand the intention behind God's play for one's spiritual growth and acts in accordance with God's will and pleasure. So, the devotee remains poised under every condition. Unlike a person following the path of knowledge who wants to merge in Brahman and become free from the cycle of birth and death, a devotee does not like the state of *sayujya*; the devotee will taste sugar and not become one with sugar. Nor will the devotee choose to escape rebirth. One remains detached; the sense-objects lose their hold on the devotee. When one goes east, one leaves the west behind. One who has tasted sugar candy does not go after cheap molasses. The devotee's prayer will be that one may be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries to serve the one God he believes in—the sum total of all souls. The devotee's life is one of unceasing prayer, a total emptying of oneself at the altar of God.

### **Yoga Philosophy: Raja Yoga**

Patanjali's yoga philosophy offers another delightful approach. It consists of eight steps: 1. *Yama*: Ahimsa, non-harming or non-violence in thought, word, and deed; *satya*, truthfulness; *asteya*, non-stealing; *brahmacharya*, celibacy or continence; and *aparigraha*, non-greed or non-hoarding. 2. *Niyama*: *Shaucha*, cleanliness; *santosha*, contentment; *tapas*, discipline, austerity; *svadhyaya*, self-study of scriptural texts; *ishvara-pranidhana*, surrender to a higher being and contemplation of a higher power, which are the basic disciplines. 3. Asana, posture. 4. Pranayama, the control of vital energy. 5. *Pratyahara*, the withdrawal of the mind and focussing it on a spot. 6. *Dharana*. 7. Dhyana. 8. Samadhi. The last three are increasing levels of concentration, and these together are called *samyama*. Pranayama should be performed under the



guidance of a guru observing total continence. This yoga method may lead an aspirant astray by presenting various miraculous powers all of which one should scrupulously avoid.

A usual problem which is faced by all aspirants is that the mind is difficult to control. Sri Krishna's advice to Arjuna, and the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali state the essence: "These thought patterns are mastered through practice and renunciation."<sup>36</sup> Renunciation, *vairagya*, means to choose the long-term beneficent in preference to the immediate pleasurable. Once this choice is made, practice means to repeatedly bring the mind to that which is beneficial in the long run. Sri Krishna describing meditation, states: "One should bring the mind under the subjugation of the Self, by restraining it from all distracting thoughts."<sup>37</sup> The mind that is to be given to God should not be wasted on trivial matters. The *Mundaka Upanishad* also states: "Know the Atman alone and refrain from all other talks; this is the Bridge to Immortality."<sup>38</sup> Patanjali states: "Yoga becomes firmly grounded by long constant efforts with great love for the end to be attained."<sup>39</sup>

### **Tantras**

Sri Ramakrishna stressed bhakti according to Narada as the ideal method for the Kali Yuga. He also had a preference for tantra *purashcarana* compared to the *vaidika* type. In the tantras there are three modes: animal or *pashu* bhava, hero or *vira* bhava, and divine or *divya* bhava. Some ideas from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* are useful for every spiritual aspirant.

### **Remarkable Experiences of Sri Ramakrishna: Kundalini Shakti, the Six Centres**

The most remarkable experience [of Sri Ramakrishna] ... was the awakening of the Kundalini Sakti, the 'Serpent Power'. He

actually saw the power, at first lying asleep at the bottom of the spinal column, then waking up and ascending along the mystic Sushumna canal and through its six centres, or lotuses, to the Sahasrara, the thousand-petalled lotus in the top of the head. He further saw that as the Kundalini went upward the different lotuses bloomed. And this phenomenon was accompanied by visions and trances. Later on, he described to his disciples and devotees the various movements of the Kundalini: the fishlike, birdlike, monkeylike, and so on. The awakening of the Kundalini is the beginning of spiritual consciousness, and its union with Siva in the Sahasrara, ending in samadhi, is the consummation of the Tantrik disciplines.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Seven Planes**

Sri Ramakrishna says:

The Vedas speak of seven planes where the mind dwells. When the mind is immersed in worldliness it dwells in the three lower planes—at the navel, the organ of generation, and the organ of evacuation. In that state the mind loses all its higher visions—it broods only on 'woman and gold'. The fourth plane of the mind is at the heart. When the mind dwells there, one has the first glimpse of spiritual consciousness. One sees light all around. Such a man, perceiving the divine light, becomes speechless with wonder and says: 'Ah! What is this? What is this?' His mind does not go downward to the objects of the world.

The fifth plane of the mind is at the throat. When the mind reaches this, the aspirant becomes free from all ignorance and illusion. He

**A**t the beginning there is much ado about work. As a man makes progress toward God, the outer display of his work becomes less and less—so much so that he cannot even sing the name and glories of God.

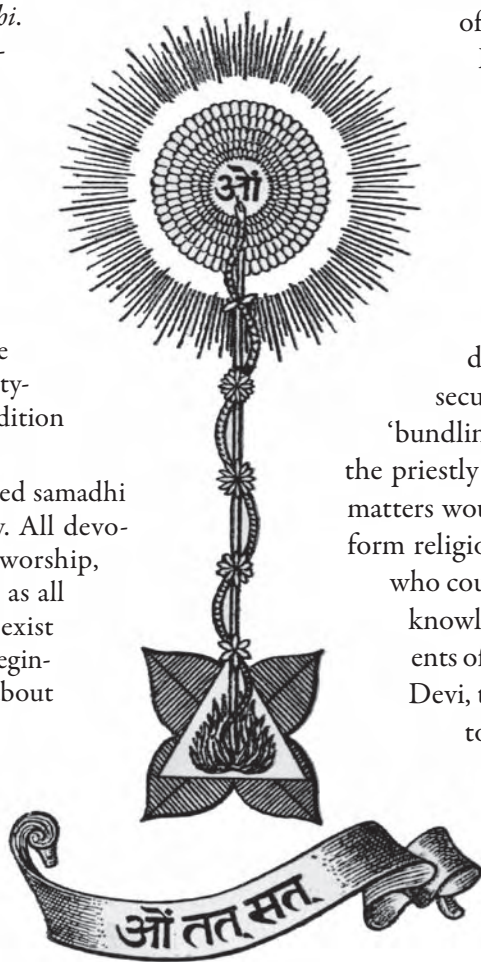
—*Gospel*, 151.

does not enjoy talking or hearing about anything but God. If people talk about worldly things, he leaves the place at once.

The sixth plane is at the forehead. When the mind reaches it, the aspirant sees the form of God day and night. But even then a little trace of ego remains. At the sight of that incomparable beauty of God's form, one becomes intoxicated and rushes forth to touch and embrace it. But one doesn't succeed. It is like the light inside a lantern. One feels as if one could touch the light, but one cannot on account of the pane of glass.

In the top of the head is the seventh plane. When the mind rises there, one goes into *samadhi*. Then the Brahmajnani directly perceives Brahman. But in that state his body does not last many days. One remains unconscious of the outer world. If milk is poured into the mouth, it runs out. Dwelling on this plane of consciousness, one gives up his body in twenty-one days. That is the condition of the Brahmajnani.

After a man has attained samadhi all his actions drop away. All devotional activities, such as worship, japa, and the like, as well as all worldly duties, cease to exist for such a person. At the beginning there is much ado about work. As a man makes progress toward God, the outer display of his work becomes less and less--so much so that he cannot even sing the name and glories of God (150-1).



### **Acquisition of Supernatural Powers: A Hindrance**

Sri Ramakrishna says: 'People practise various Tantrik disciplines to acquire supernatural powers. How mean such people are! Sri Krishna said to Arjuna, "Friend, by acquiring one of the eight siddhis you may add a little to your power, but you will not be able to realize Me." One cannot get rid of maya as long as one exercises supernatural powers. And maya begets egotism' (285).

### **Sri Ramakrishna and His Gospel**

Sri Ramakrishna was born as Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya in the rural setting of Kamarpukur in the district of Howrah; not far from there, in Jayarambati was born Sri Sarada Devi, his divine consort, an embodiment of motherliness, saintliness, compassion, and wisdom of the rarest kind.

Gadadhar's childhood days show that he was averse to secular learning which he termed 'bundling rice and plantains'. Born in the priestly class, education in religious matters would have enabled him to perform religious ceremonies wherein, one who could show the highest religious knowledge would get greater presents of rice and plantains. Sri Sarada Devi, though she tried several times to master reading, was greatly discouraged by her relatives; in those days women could not come to the forefront by learning as their field of activity was in the household.

Gadadhar was brought to Calcutta, now Kolkata, by his elder brother Ramkumar so that he could apply his mind to secular education. This did not happen, however. It was owing to destiny however that Ramkumar had to come to Dakshineswar, first to give his scriptural opinion on how Rani Rasmani, a non-Brahmin, could fulfil her earnest desire to install Mother Bhavatarani Kali's image in the temple there and how She could be worshipped daily despite other Brahmins not being in favour of a non-Brahmin being the proprietress of the temple. Ramkumar suggested the way for this and himself agreed to worship the Divine Mother.

Though Sri Ramakrishna was averse to secular learning, he was keen on acquiring spiritual knowledge. Besides the conventional mode of learning in a *gurukula* under the care of a guru as of yore, he had several *other* sources of Knowledge which will justify to the reader how a poor Brahmin, averse to secular knowledge, a temple priest at that, could command the respect of many learned, accomplished aspirants in the field of spirituality. Keshab Chandra Sen, a leading Brahmo leader, who found favour with the queen of England, and Mahendralal Sarkar, a practising doctor of great standing, used to listen to Sri Ramakrishna for hours; Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar found much wisdom he had not heard of before in Sri Ramakrishna's words: 'What Brahman is no tongue has yet been able to describe. Therefore Brahman is still undefiled' (900).

During the early visits M. had told Sri Ramakrishna regarding his wife: 'I am afraid she is ignorant' (80). And he was promptly rebuffed: "And you are a man of knowledge!" M. had yet to learn the distinction between knowledge and ignorance. Up to this time his conception had been that one got knowledge from books and schools. Later on he gave up this false

conception. He was taught that to know God is knowledge, and not to know Him, ignorance' (ibid.). The next question, whether he believed in God with form or in God without form, took M. by surprise. He thought: 'How can one believe in God without form when one believes in God with form? And if one believes in God without form, how can one believe that God has a form? Can these two contradictory ideas be true at the same time? Can a white liquid like milk be black?' (ibid.).

It did not end there! M. said: 'Suppose one believes in God with form. Certainly He is not the clay image!' (ibid.). Sri Ramakrishna, whose perception of image worship was clear from personal experience said: "But why clay? It is an image of Spirit. M. could not quite understand the significance of this "image of Spirit". "But, sir", he said to Sri Ramakrishna, "one should explain to those who worship the clay image that it is not God, and that, while worshipping it, they should have God in view and not the clay image. One should not worship clay" (ibid.).

Sri Ramakrishna thereupon said sharply:

'That's the one hobby of you Calcutta people—giving lectures and bringing others to the light! Nobody ever stops to consider how to get the light himself. Who are you to teach others? He who is the Lord of the Universe will teach everyone. He alone teaches us, who has created this universe; who has made the sun and moon, men and beasts, and all other beings; who has provided means for their sustenance; who has given children parents and endowed them with love to bring them up. The Lord has done so many things—will He not show people the way

**T**he caste-system can be removed by one means only, and that is the love of God. Lovers of God do not belong to any caste. The mind, body, and soul of a man become purified through divine love. —*Gospel*, 155.



to worship Him? If they need teaching, then He will be the Teacher. He is our Inner Guide. Suppose there is an error in worshipping the clay image; doesn't God know that through it He alone is being invoked? He will be pleased with that very worship. Why should you get a headache over it? You had better try for knowledge and devotion yourself' (ibid.).

### **Sri Ramakrishna:**

#### **His Sources of Knowledge**

##### **Mother Kali, his Guide in Spirituality**

Ramkumar wanted Sri Ramakrishna to learn the intricate rituals of the worship of Kali. To become a priest of Kali one must undergo a special form of initiation from a qualified guru, and for Sri Ramakrishna a suitable Brahmin was found [in Kenaram Bhattacharya]. But no sooner did the brahmin speak the mantra in his ear than Sri Ramakrishna, overwhelmed with emotion, uttered a loud cry and plunged into deep concentration. Mathur begged Sri Ramakrishna to take charge of the worship in the Kali temple. The young priest pleaded his incompetence and his ignorance of the scriptures. Mathur insisted that devotion and sincerity, which Sri Ramakrishna had in plenty, would more than compensate for any lack of formal knowledge and make the Divine Mother manifest herself through the image. In the end, Sri Ramakrishna had to yield to Mathur's request. He became the priest of Kali (12).

To Her [Kali] he would pray: 'I do not know what these things are. I am ignorant of mantras and the scriptures. Teach me, Mother, how to realize Thee. Who else can help me? Art Thou not my only refuge and guide?' And the sustaining presence of the Mother never failed him in his distress or doubt (15).

Sri Ramakrishna recalls:

Weeping, I prayed to the Mother: 'O Mother, reveal to me what is contained in the Vedas and the Vedanta. Reveal to me what is in the Purana and the Tantra.' One by one She has revealed all

these to me. 'Yes, She has taught me everything. Oh, how many things she has shown me! One day She showed me Siva and Sakti everywhere. Everywhere I saw the communion of Siva and Sakti. Shiva and Sakti existing in all living things— men, animals, trees, plants. I saw them in the communion of all male and female elements. Another day I was shown heaps of human heads, mountain high. Nothing else existed, and I was seated alone in their midst. Still another day She showed me an ocean. Taking the form of a salt doll, I was going to measure its depth. While doing this, through the grace of the guru I was turned to stone. Then I saw a ship and at once got into it. ... The guru was the helmsman in that boat. I saw that 'I' and 'you' were two different things. Again I jumped into the ocean, and was changed into a fish. I found myself swimming joyfully in the Ocean of Satchidananda. These are all deep mysteries. What can you understand through reasoning? You will realize everything when God Himself teaches you. Then you will not lack any knowledge (376–7).

#### **Contacts with Innumerable**

##### **Holy Men and Scholars**

Sri Ramakrishna had not read books, no doubt, yet he possessed an encyclopedic knowledge of religions and religious philosophies. This he acquired from his contacts with innumerable holy men and scholars. He had a unique power of assimilation; through meditation he made this knowledge a part of his being. Once, when he was asked by a disciple about the source of his seemingly inexhaustible knowledge, he replied: 'I have not read; but I have heard the learned. I have made a garland of their knowledge, wearing it round my neck, and I have given it as an offering at the feet of the Mother' (33).

#### **Visit of Great Scholars and**

##### **Aspirants of Great Repute**

'Sri Ramakrishna used to say that when the flower blooms the bees come to it for honey of their own accord. Many souls began to visit

Dakshineswar to satisfy their spiritual hunger. He, the devotee and aspirant, became their Master' (ibid.). That Sri Ramakrishna became their Master amply proves that Sri Ramakrishna was in possession of all scriptural knowledge which they were seeking.

Gauri, the great scholar who had been one of the first to proclaim Sri Ramakrishna an Incarnation of God, paid the Master a visit in 1870 and with the Master's blessings renounced the world. Narayan Shastri, another great pundit, who had mastered the six systems of Hindu philosophy and had been offered a lucrative post by the Maharaja of Jaipur, met the Master and recognized in him one who had realized in life those ideals which he himself had encountered merely in books. Sri Ramakrishna initiated Narayan Shastri, at his earnest request, into the life of sannyasa. Pundit Padmalochan, the court pundit of the Maharaja of Burdwan, well known for his scholarship in both the Vedanta and the Nyaya systems of philosophy, accepted Sri Ramakrishna as an Incarnation of God. Hearing the details of the spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna and desiring to compare them with those of the perfected seers of past ages, Padmalochan and other eminent Pandits said to him, 'Your experiences have gone far beyond those recorded in the Vedas and the Puranas.' Krishnakishore, a Vedantist scholar, became devoted to the Master. And there arrived Viswanath Upadhyaya, who was later to become a favourite devotee; Sri Ramakrishna always addressed him as 'Captain'. He was a high officer of the King of Nepal and had received the title of Colonel in recognition of his merit. A scholar of the *Gita*, the *Bhagavata*, and the Vedanta philosophy, he daily performed the worship of his Chosen Deity with great devotion. 'I have read the Vedas and the other scriptures', he said. 'I have also met a good many monks and devotees in different places. But it is in Sri Ramakrishna's presence that my spiritual yearnings have been fulfilled. To me he seems to be the embodiment of the truths of the scriptures' (ibid.).



*Mother Bhavatarini Kali of Dakshineswar*

The Upanishadic dictum 'A knower of Brahman verily becomes Brahman'<sup>41</sup> justifies Sri Ramakrishna's thorough grasp of the scriptures.

### **Sannyasi with a Trident Taught All He had Learnt from his Gurus**

The Master [Sri Ramakrishna] said that when the aspirant becomes purified and sanctified by completely controlling his mind and senses by means of restraint and renunciation, his own mind occupies the position of the Guru. The waves of ideas that arise then in his mind never lead him astray; on the contrary, they show him the right path and bring him quickly to the goal of life. During this period the in pure

**A** man becomes liberated even in this life when he knows that God is the Doer of all things.

—*Gospel*, 159.

and holy mind of the Master became his Guru and taught him what was and what was not to be done. It did not, however, rest satisfied there, but on many occasions, assuming a form, as it were, of a different person, it came out from his body, appeared before him and encouraged him to go forward with his Sadhana. Sometimes it threatened him with punishment if he did not dive deep in a particular discipline, explaining why it should be performed and what its result would be. This is why the Master saw at the time of meditation a Sannyasin with a sharp trident in his band come out of his body and say, 'If you do not fully give up all other thoughts and meditate wholeheartedly on your chosen Ideal, I'll pierce your heart with this trident.'

This is why when the Papa-purusha, the embodiment of desires for enjoyment, emerged from his body, this young Sannyasin whom the Master saw also came out immediately and killed that villain. Desirous to see the images of deities or listen to the singing of God's glory in distant places, this young Sannyasin came out of the Master's body in an effulgent form similar to his and arrived at those places along

*Painting of Acharya Shankara and his Disciples by Raja Ravi Varma*



a luminous path and returned along the same path and entered his gross body. We have been told by the Master himself of many such visions.

The Master began to have the vision of this young Sannyasin within his body, almost from the commencement of his Sadhana. He became gradually accustomed to guide himself according to his advice regarding the performance or non-performance of all actions. In the course of a conversation on the extraordinary visions and experiences of his life during his Sadhana, one day, the Master said to us, 'The figure of a young Sannyasin looking like me used to come out again and again from within me and instruct me on all matters; when he emerged, sometimes I had a little consciousness and, at other times, lost it altogether and lay inert, only seeing and hearing his actions and words; when afterwards he entered this gross body, I regained full consciousness. The Brahmani, Tota Puri and others came and taught me afterwards what I had heard from him previously—they taught me what I had already known. It seems from this that they came as Gurus in my life in order that the authority of the scriptures, such as the Vedas, might be maintained by my honouring their injunctions. No other reason can be found for accepting the "naked one" and others as Gurus.'<sup>42</sup>

### Hearing

Scriptural knowledge can be had through the medium of hearing also. In very ancient times the guru would say some passages from the scriptures and the disciples would repeat it thrice. Thus they used to commit to memory. There were no textbooks or the internet! While discussing how a person attains liberation through devotion, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'The cockroach becomes motionless by constantly meditating on the kumira worm; it loses the power to move. At last it is transformed into a kumira. Similarly, by constantly meditating on God the bhakta loses his ego; he realizes that God is he and he is God. When the cockroach becomes the kumira everything is achieved.'<sup>43</sup>



Once Amrita, a devotee asked: “Sir, how do you feel in *samadhi*?” Master: “You may have heard that the cockroach, by intently meditating on the brahmara, is transformed into a brahmara. Do you know how I feel then? I feel like a fish released from a pot into the water of the Ganges” (196). We come across this example of *bhramara* in the *Vivekachudamani*: ‘A person intensely concentrating on the Real attains the Real. The *kitaka* [a worm of a particular kind] thinking of the particular type of bee becomes that bee itself.’<sup>44</sup> It is easy to conjecture that Sri Ramakrishna must have grasped this through the faculty of hearing. There are some technical issues in this analogy, however, which we find elaborated in the commentaries: The worm thinks of the bee out of fear and not out of love; again the worm is different from the bee; further the worm becomes a different bee and not the same bee of which it had thought deeply out of fear. It is maintained that a jiva who is not different from Brahman, meditates on his being Brahman, a fact, with deep love and yearning, and becomes the same Brahman and not another.

Sri Ramakrishna once said: ‘Do not reason. Who can ever know God? I have heard it from Nangta [Totapuri], once for all, that this whole universe is only a fragment of Brahman.’<sup>45</sup> In several places in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, one finds Sri Ramakrishna discouraging fruitless reasoning but maintaining always to reason between what is Real and what is unreal. That was the only reasoning he allowed.

Once he asked Mahendranath Gupta: ‘Is there any book in English on reasoning?’ M. answered in the affirmative stating that it is called ‘Logic’. Sri Ramakrishna asked him to tell what English logic says. M. said:

‘One part of the book deals with deduction from the general to the particular. For example: All men are mortal. Scholars are men. Therefore

scholars are mortal. Another part deals with the method of reasoning from the particular to the general. For example: This crow is black. That crow is black. The crows we see everywhere are black. Therefore all crows are black. But there may be a fallacy in a conclusion arrived at in this way; for on inquiry one may find a white crow in some country. There is another illustration: If there is rain, there is, or has been, a cloud. Therefore rain comes from a cloud. Still another example: This man has thirty-two teeth. That man has thirty-two teeth. All the men we see have thirty-two teeth. Therefore men have thirty-two teeth. English logic deals with such inductions and deductions.’ Sri Ramakrishna barely heard these words (88–9).

His interest was only in reasoning regarding the Real and the unreal.

Rakhal sat by the Master and read about Lord Erskine from *Self-Help* by Smiles.

Master (to M.): ‘What does the book say?’

M: ‘It says that Lord Erskine performed his duty without desiring any result for himself. Disinterested duty.’

Master: ‘That is very good. But the characteristic of a man of Perfect Knowledge is that he doesn’t keep a single book with him’ (341).

Hari [later Swami Turiyananda] lived with his brothers at their Baghbazar house. He had studied up to the matriculation class in the General Assembly Institution. Then he had given up his studies and devoted his time at home to the contemplation of God, the reading of

Is it possible to understand God’s action and His motive? He creates, He preserves, and He destroys. Can we ever understand why He destroys? I say to the Divine Mother: ‘O Mother, I do not need to understand. Please give me love for Thy Lotus Feet.’ The aim of human life is to attain bhakti. As for other things, the Mother knows best.

—*Gospel*, 161.

the scriptures, and the practice of yoga. He also visited the Master now and then. Sri Ramakrishna often sent for Hari when he went to Balam's house in Baghbazar.

Master (to the devotees): 'I have heard a great deal about Buddha. He is one of the ten Incarnations of God. Brahman is immovable, immutable, inactive, and of the nature of Consciousness. When a man merges his buddhi, his intelligence, in Bodha, Consciousness, then he attains the Knowledge of Brahman; he becomes buddha, enlightened' (430).

Sri Ramakrishna asked once:

Why [call Buddha an] atheist? He was not an atheist. He simply could not express his inner experiences in words. Do you know what 'Buddha' means? It is to become one with Bodha, Pure Intelligence, by meditating on That which is of the nature of Pure Intelligence; it is to become Pure Intelligence Itself. ... Why should Buddha be called an atheist? When one realizes Svarupa, the true nature of one's Self, one attains a state that is something between *asti*, is, and *nasti*, is-not. ... This 'existence' and 'non-existence' are attributes of Prakriti. The Reality is beyond both (947-8).

Once a devotee named Mukherji commented: 'It is good to read sacred books like the Gita.' Thereupon Sri Ramakrishna pointed out: 'But what will you gain by mere reading? Some have heard of milk, some have seen it, and there are some, besides, who have drunk it. God can indeed be seen; what is more, one can talk to Him' (344).

**R**emember that *daya*, compassion, and *maya*, attachment, are two different things. Attachment means the feeling of 'my-ness' toward one's relatives. It is the love one feels for one's parents, one's brother, one's sister, one's wife and children. Compassion is the love one feels for all beings of the world. It is an attitude of equality.

—Gospel, 161.

What is the difference that is being pointed out by Sri Ramakrishna?

That God exists may be known by looking at the universe. But it is one thing to hear of God, another thing to see God, and still another thing to talk to God. Some have heard of milk, some have seen it, and some, again, have tasted it. You feel happy when you see milk; you are nourished and strengthened when you drink it. You will get peace of mind only when you have seen God. You will enjoy bliss and gain strength only when you have talked to Him (368).

He declared that God is, can be seen, he has seen God, and we too can see God. This seeing 'more intensely than I see you'<sup>46</sup> is a more tangible perception than our seeing the world around us. These words dispelled the demon of doubt in the minds of the youth of those times.

Once a devotee, Kedar, asked: 'How can I get rid of my dizziness?' With great tenderness Sri Ramakrishna replied: 'One gets that [dizziness]. I have had it myself. Use a little almond oil. I have heard that it cures dizziness.'<sup>47</sup> When someone said that medicine had no effect and it was nature that cures, Sri Ramakrishna spontaneously asked: 'If that is so, why does opium cause constipation?' (406).

'Only two kinds of people can attain self-knowledge: those who are not encumbered at all with learning, that is to say, whose minds are not over-crowded with thoughts borrowed from others; and those who, after studying all the scriptures and sciences, have come to realise that they know nothing.'<sup>48</sup> This is an echo of the *Kena Upanishad* statement: 'I do not think, "I know Brahman well enough". I consider, "Not that I do not know: I know and I do not know as well". One amongst us who understands that utterance, "Not that I do not know: I know and I do not know as well", knows that Brahman.'<sup>49</sup>

One day Sri Ramakrishna had an invitation from a Harisabha, and he went there accompanied by his nephew Hriday. There was the reading and explaining of the Bhagavata that day, and the Master went there to listen to it. All were absorbed in listening to it when Sri Ramakrishna arrived there and sat amongst the audience. This incident shows his keen interest in the reading of the Bhagavata.

### Reading, Singing, Enacting

Scriptural knowledge can be had through reading with attention which consists of both reading and hearing. When the women of the village were free from their household duties, many of them would come to Chandradevi and if they found Gadadhar at home, they would sometimes ask him to sing for them or read religious narratives. ... This became almost a daily routine. ... Besides reading the Puranas, Gadadhar entertained the women in various other ways. ... as many of the villagers were Vaishnavas, there used to be in their houses reading every evening from the Bhagavata, or singing of the praises of the divine Lord. His gift of memory enabled Gadadhar to remember many of those musical compositions, plays, songs and hymns to God, which he had heard from his childhood. As a special entertainment, one day he would begin a drama; on another sing the songs of Bauls or Kavis; or again sing the praises of the divine Lord. When he enacted a play, he would himself play the various parts, changing his voice to suit each character. ... he would imitate so well the peculiar manner and gestures of some one in the village known to all of them that they would roar with laughter.<sup>50</sup>

One day,

Sri Ramakrishna asked Mahimacharan to recite a few hymns from the scriptures. Mahima read the first verse of the *Uttara Gita*, describing the nature of the Supreme Brahman:

He, Brahman, is one, partless, stainless, and beyond the ether;  
Without beginning or end, unknowable by mind or intelligence.

Finally he came to the seventh verse of the third chapter, which reads:

The twice-born worships the Deity in fire,  
The munis contemplate Him in the heart,  
Men of limited wisdom see Him in the image,  
And the yogis who have attained  
samesightedness





Behold Him everywhere.

No sooner did the Master hear the words 'the yogis who have attained same-sightedness' than he stood up and went into samadhi, his arm supported by the splint and bandage. Speechless, the devotees looked at this yogi who had himself attained the state of samesightedness.<sup>51</sup>

It was another memorable day for Swamiji, who recounts:

As soon as I went to Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna gave me those books which he forbade others to read. Among other books, a copy of

the *Ashtavakra Samhita* was in his room. When the Master found anyone reading that book, he would forbid him and would give him instead such books as 'Mukti and How to Attain it', the *Bhagavad Gita* or some Purana. But, scarcely had I gone to him, when he took out the book and asked me to read it. Or, he would ask to read some part of the *Adhyatma Ramayana* which is full of non-dualistic ideas. I would reply, sometimes bluntly, 'What is the use of reading this book? It is a sin even to think, "I am God"'. The book teaches this blasphemy. It should be burnt.' Sri Ramakrishna would smile

*Monastic and Householder Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna with Girish Chandra Ghosh at the Centre*



and say, 'Do I ask you to read it for yourself? I ask you to read a little to me. Please do it. In that case, you will not have to think that you are God.' So I had to read a little for him at his request.<sup>52</sup>

### **How Dramas Contribute to Spiritual Knowledge**

On 14 December 1884 Sri Ramakrishna 'arrived at the Star Theatre on Beadon Street in Kolkata to see a play about the life of the Prahlada' of exalted devotion to God. Sri Ramakrishna praised Girish Chandra Ghosh by saying: 'You have written nice plays.' Girish humbly replied that he merely wrote plays but had assimilated very little. To this Sri Ramakrishna emphatically said: 'No, you assimilate a great deal. The other day I said to you that no one could sketch a divine character unless he had love of God in his heart. Yes, one needs to assimilate spiritual ideas.'<sup>53</sup>

He observed that merely reading books without assimilation was of no use. At this point Girish expressed his desire to give up the theatre. Then Sri Ramakrishna highlighted the use of the theatrical plays by saying: 'People will learn much from your plays' (ibid.). On being asked how he liked the performance, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'I found that it was God Himself who was acting the different parts. Those who played the female parts seemed to me the direct embodiments of the Blissful Mother, and the cowherd boys of Goloka the embodiments of Narayana Himself. It was God alone who had become all these' (678).

### **Sri Ramakrishna's Contribution to Spiritual Thought**

#### **The State of a Vijnani:**

#### **A Contribution to Spiritual Thought**

Sri Ramakrishna extended the horizons of spiritual thought through his experience of the state

of a *vijnana*. Personal experience has great value in spiritual life. Sri Ramakrishna said:

Take a Vilva fruit in your hand and try to ascertain which of the three, the outer shell, seeds or the pulp, is the fruit. At first you discard the shell as not being the substance; and do the same with the seeds; and then, on isolating the pulp, say that that is the real Vilva fruit. Then comes the decision that the shell, like the seeds, belongs to what the pulp is made of it is the shell, seeds and the pulp that together make the Vilva fruit. Similarly, after directly knowing the Absolute, comes the conclusion that that which is the Absolute, is in sport the relative, the universe.<sup>54</sup>

He also says: 'A man wanting to climb to the roof first negates the stairs as not being the roof, but on reaching the roof he finds that the stairs are made of the same materials as the roof.'<sup>55</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna says: 'The Nitya and the Lila belong to the same Reality. Therefore I accept everything, the Relative as well as the Absolute. I don't explain away the world as maya. Were I to do that I should get short weight' (652). Sri Ramakrishna gives as example several other pairs: fire and its burning power; milk and its whiteness; gem and its splendour; snake and its wriggling motion, butter and buttermilk, ocean and its waves. These pairs go together.

It is the process of *negation* and *affirmation*. One realises the Nitya by negating the Leela. Then one affirms the Leela, seeing in it the manifestation of the Nitya. This world is the Leela of God. It is like a game. In this game there are the pairs of opposites: joy and sorrow, virtue and

**B**ut you must remember that nothing can be achieved except in its proper time. Some persons must pass through many experiences and perform many worldly duties before they can turn their attention to God; so they have to wait a long time.

—*Gospel*, 162.



*Portrait in which Sri Ramakrishna showing Keshav Chandra Sen about Harmony of Religions*

vice, knowledge and ignorance, good and evil. The game cannot continue if sin and suffering are altogether eliminated from the creation.

Sri Ramakrishna says: 'It is God who gives us evil tendencies as well as good tendencies. ... Some trees give sweet fruit, and some bitter or sour. God has made the mango-tree, which yields sweet fruit, and also the hog plum, which yields sour fruit. ... Good produces good, and bad produces bad. Don't you get the hot taste if you eat chillies? ... these are all God's lila, His play' (250).

He says further:

He alone has attained perfect love of God who, having reached the Absolute, keeps himself in the realm of the Relative in order to enjoy the divine lila. A man can describe the ways and activities of the Queen if he has previously visited her in England. Only then will his description of the Queen be correct. Sages like Bharadvaja adored Rama saying: 'O Rama, You are the Indivisible

Satchidananda. You have appeared before us as a human being, but You look like a man because You have shrouded Yourself with Your own Maya.' These rishis were great devotees of Rama, and had supreme love for God (189).

These rishis recognised the divine lila of Sri Rama as an incarnation of God. Sri Ramakrishna said: 'The Absolute plays in many ways: as Isvara, as the gods, as man, and as the universe. The Incarnation is the play of the Absolute as man. Do you know how the Absolute plays as man? It is like the rushing down of water from a big roof through a pipe; the power of Satchidananda—nay, Satchidananda Itself—descends through the conduit of a human form as water descends through the pipe' (359).

Sri Ramakrishna would say:

But vijñana means Knowledge with a greater fullness. Some have heard of milk, some have seen milk, and some have drunk milk. He who has merely heard of it is 'ignorant'. He who has



seen it is a jnani. But he who has drunk it has vijñana, that is to say, a fuller knowledge of it. After having the vision of God one talks to Him as if He were an intimate relative. That is vijñana (417).

The vijñani always sees God (477). 'He alone who, after reaching the Nitya, the Absolute, can dwell in the Lila, the Relative, and again climb from the Lila to the Nitya, has ripe knowledge and devotion. Sages like Narada cherished love of God after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman. This is called vijñana' (523).

The Nitya and the Lila are the two aspects of the one Reality. It is described in the Vedas as 'Om Satchidananda Brahman', in the Tantras as 'Om Satchidananda Siva', the ever-pure Siva, and in the Puranas as 'Om Satchidananda Krishna'. All the scriptures, the Vedas, the Puranas, and the Tantras, speak only of one Satchidananda (490).

With these words of explanation Sri Ramakrishna widened the horizons of spiritual knowledge to include the world also unlike the jnanis who exclude it as unreal and gives scope for meditation on the world itself as Brahman in its 'as' aspect, Shakti, without in the least disturbing the 'is' aspect, Brahman.

The *vijñani* goes a step further and says that Brahman has become the world. His understanding is mature: Sri Ramakrishna's experience is that this relative world is real too. Change and changelessness belong to the same Reality. His weighing of the *vilva* fruit is exact. He sees Consciousness permeating all existence—the image, the utensils used for worship, in the tree from which juice oozes when a leaf is plucked.

Swami Turiyananda says that this world is also true. These are lofty realisations. In the field of action, it is expressed as service to human beings in the spirit of worship of God. This is the method for the present age. In the arena of practice, any object can be meditated upon as

Brahman, be it a child, a goat, or a peg driven into the ground and used for tying cattle. Sri Ramakrishna asks, if God can be worshipped in images, can God not be worshipped in the human being? There are stars in the sky at night; are they not there in the day also? God can be meditated upon with eyes closed; can God not be meditated upon with eyes open?

Swami Prabhavananda was discussing with another disciple the spiritual visions of Gopal's Mother or Gopaler Ma. He 'opined that these visions belonged to the transcendental plane and that she had not actually seen Sri Krishna. How could one see God in the external world with physical eyes? Swami Brahmananda then said, "Show me the line of demarcation where matter ends and spirit begins."<sup>56</sup> In other words when the eye of the spirit opens one sees Brahman everywhere.'<sup>57</sup>

### Divine Mother's Command:

#### 'Remain in *Bhavamukha*'

The Divine Mother's command, 'Remain in *bhavamukha*' is yet another contribution of Sri Ramakrishna through his personal experience. One common misconception is that spiritual experience comes from scriptural study; people forget that scriptures take shape out of the personal experiences of men of realisation. To remain in *bhavamukha* means to stay in that position, on one side of which is *bhavatita*, beyond all bhavas and on the other is the *bhavas-rota*, the stream of bhavas. From such a vantage point one can see both the sides.

Sri Ramakrishna sometimes was confused by Haladhari's scholarship.

One day, ... he [Haladhari] proved that his

**S**uicide is a heinous sin, undoubtedly. A man who kills himself must return again and again to this world and suffer its agony.

—*Gospel*, 164.

divine experiences in ecstasy were all untrue and pointed out, with the help of the scriptures, that God was beyond existence and non-existence. Great was the Master's perturbation. Narrating this incident, he said later, 'I thought that the divine forms I saw and the divine words I heard during Bhavasamadhi were then all a delusion. Mother, I saw, had indeed deceived me? Extremely anxious, I cried with the feeling of wounded love and said to Mother, "Shouldst Thou, O Mother, deceive me so, because I am unlettered and ignorant?" That cry of agony would not stop. I sat and wept in the "mansion". What I some time afterwards was a fog-like smoke rising suddenly from the floor and filling some space in front of me. I saw later in that smoke a beautiful living face of golden complexion, with beard reaching to the breast! That figure looked steadfastly at me and said with a profound voice, "My child, remain in Bhavamukha." That figure repeated those words thrice and immediately dissolved in the fog, and the fog-like smoke also vanished into the void. When I had that vision, I got back my peace of mind.'<sup>58</sup>

The Divine Mother, thus, was a living Reality to Sri Ramakrishna. 'One day the Master [Sri

Ramakrishna] himself described this event to Swami Premananda. The Master said that the same doubt arose in his mind once again when he remembered those words of Haladhari. "Sitting for worship", said our Master, "I cried and pressed Mother importunately for a solution of the problem. Mother then appeared near the worship-jar in the guise of a woman named 'Rati's mother' and said, 'Do remain in Bhavamukha'" (164).

Again when Totapuri, the travelling monk, left Dakshineswar after imparting to Sri Ramakrishna, Vedantic knowledge and after the Master dwelt in the Nirvikalpa plane of consciousness continually for six months, he heard in his heart of hearts at the end of that period the incorporeal voice of the Divine Mother: 'Remain in Bhavamukha' (256).

### **Scholarship Meaningless Without Discrimination and Renunciation**

Once when Sri Ramakrishna was talking to Devendra, he suddenly got into that state of mind in which he could see a man as he really is.

If I see that a scholar has no discrimination and renunciation, I regard him as worthless straw.

*Keshav Chandra Sen with his Brahmo Followers*



I see that he is like a vulture, which soars high but fixes its look on a charnel-pit down below. I found that Devendra had combined both yoga and bhoga in his life. He had a number of children, all young. The family physician was there. Thus, you see, though he was a jnani, yet he was preoccupied with worldly life. I said to him: 'You are the King Janaka of this Kaliyuga.

Holding to one as well as the other,  
He drank his milk from a brimming cup!

I have heard that you live in the world and think of God; so I have come to see you. Please tell me something about God.<sup>59</sup>

Just because Devendra used to spend time thinking of God albeit living in the world with its enjoyments, Sri Ramakrishna was eager to hear something about God even from him.

### ***Sri Ramakrishna's Discussion on Various Important Topics***

**With Sharat and Shashi on Marriage:** On a certain day in October 1883, Sharat, later Swami Saradananda and Shashi, later Swami Ramakrishnananda went to Dakshineswar. After preliminary inquiries Sri Ramakrishna learnt that they now and then went to Keshab's Brahmo Samaj. Then he said:

'Bricks and tiles, if burnt with the trademark on them, retain these marks for ever. ... But nowadays parents get their boys married while quite young, and thus pave the way to their ruin. The boys come out of school to find themselves fathers of several children. So they run hither and thither in search of a job to maintain the family. With great difficulty perhaps they find one, but are hard pressed to feed so many mouths with that small income. They become naturally anxious to earn money and therefore find little time to think of God.'

'Then, sir, is it wrong to marry? Is it against the will of God?' asked one of the boys. The Master asked him to take a certain book down from the shelf and directed him to read a

particular passage that quoted Christ's opinion on marriage. 'For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb, there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men; and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive.' The Master then asked him to read Saint Paul: 'I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.'

Someone interrupted, saying: 'Do you mean to say, sir, that marriage is against the will of God? And how can His creation go on if people cease to marry?' Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said: 'Don't worry about that. Those who wish to marry are at perfect liberty to do so. What I said just now was between ourselves. I speak on what I have got to say, you take as much of it as you like and no more.'<sup>60</sup>

These stirring words of renunciation opened up a new vision to Sharat and Shashi. Is this incident possible without scriptural knowledge and understanding?

Again Sri Ramakrishna remarks: 'Darkness is needed too. It reveals all the more the glory of light. There is no doubt that anger, lust, and greed are evils. Why, then, has God created them? In order to create saints. A man becomes a saint by conquering the senses. Is there anything impossible for a man who has subdued his passions? He can even realize God, through His grace.'<sup>61</sup>

**Discussion on Self-surrender and Free Will:** Once the younger Naren asked: 'Sir, have we any free will?' To this Sri Ramakrishna replied

**T**he bound creatures, entangled in worldliness, will not come to their senses at all. They suffer so much misery and agony, they face so many dangers, and yet they will not wake up.

—*Gospel*, 165.



revealing the depth of his understanding: 'Just try to find out who this "I" is. While you are searching for "I", "He" comes out. "I am the machine and He is the Operator." You have heard of a mechanical toy that goes into a store with a letter in its hand. You are like that toy. God alone is the Doer. Do your duties in the world as if you were the doer, but knowing all the time that God alone is the Doer and you are the instrument' (804).

The Master's teachings to the devotees can be broadly divided into two classes. The reader will realize it when we quote a few of these. On the one hand we find him saying to his devotees, 'I have cooked food, simply sit down to partake of it'; 'The mould is prepared, cast your own minds and get the form'; 'If you cannot do anything at all, give me your power of attorney', so on and so forth; and on the other hand, 'Give up all desires one by one, it is then that you will succeed'; 'Be like a cast-off leaf blown by the wind'; 'Give up lust and lucre and call on God'; 'I have done all the sixteen parts. Do at least one part yourselves' and so on. It seems that our progress in life is retarded, because we very often fail to understand the significance of the Master's teachings and thus to choose between free will and pre-destination, self-effort and self-surrender.

One day at Dakshineswar we had a long discussion with one of our friends on free will and pre-destination and went to the Master for its true solution. The Master amused himself with our boyish discussion for some time and then said seriously, 'Is there anyone who has free will or anything like that? It is by God's will alone that everything has always happened and shall happen. Man understands it in the long run. But then something has to be added. Just as, when a cow is tied to a post with a long tether, it can stand at a distance of one cubit from it or of the whole length of the rope, so it is with the free will of man. A man ties a cow with the idea "Let her lie down, stand or move about

wherever she wills within that area." Similarly God has given man some power. And He has also given him freedom to use as much of it as he likes and in any way. This is why man feels he is free. But the rope is fastened to the post. And mark this: If anyone prays to Him in all humility, He may remove him to another place and tie him there; or He may lengthen the tether or even remove it completely from his neck.'

Thus instructed, we asked, 'Then man has no hand in practising religious discipline. Everyone may say, "Whatever I do, is according to His will."'

The Master said: 'Of what avail is it to say so? They are empty words. What avails it to say, "There is no thorn, no pricking?" As soon as you touch a thorn you cry out "Ugh". If the practising of Sadhana were in the hands of man, all would have undertaken it. But how is it that they can't? There is, however, one thing: He does not give one more power, if the little that is given is not properly used. This is why individual effort and perseverance are necessary. Don't you see, everyone has to make some effort, however small, before he gets God's grace? When one does so, the experiences of ten lives are crowded, through His grace, into one and then all come to an end.'<sup>62</sup>

**Can that which is *Akhanda* become *Khanda*?**  
We are human beings with little understanding!

One day, while returning after paying one of his occasional visits to the temple, the Master saw Jayanarayan Bandyopadhyaya, the well-known landlord of the place, standing with many people in the Ghat consecrated by himself. As he was known to Jayanarayan, he went to meet him. Jayanarayan saluted and welcomed him respectfully and introduced him to his companions. In the course of the conversation he raised the topic of the Kali temple of Rani Rasmani and asked the Master, 'Sir, is Govinda of that temple broken?' The Master said to him, 'Ah, what a fine understanding! Can One, who is an indivisible whole, be broken?' (131-2).

By the word 'Govinda', usually the image of Sri Krishna is meant, but to Sri Ramakrishna it represented the Indivisible; how can the Indivisible be divided?

**Give up the Eight Fetters:**

'The Master taught us many a time that one could not realize God till one gave up the eight ties of shame, hatred, fear and the egoism due to birth, family, good conduct, etc., which accompanied one from life to life. How far he himself followed that teaching in body, mind and speech, all his life can clearly be understood by a careful study of all his actions including the wearing of dress, ornaments, etc., at the time of his Sadhana' (233). To get rid of the idea of being born in a brahmin family, he would clean at night the toilet of Rasik, a scavenger, because he would not let him do that during the day. He would fall prostrate before a woman who carried night soil on her head, saying that it was only the Mother who could do such a thing.

**Setting Up A Positive Association:**

This is a great tool in the hand of the spiritual aspirant. In computer parlance, we talk of a pointer and a pointee. A pointer is that which points to something, and that something is called the pointee. One can set up a positive association of everything to the divine. Everything becomes a pointer to the divine. Instead, it is seen that one sets up a negative association and ends up in grief. The image of God, a holy man, a place of pilgrimage, and the like are well known pointers for positive association.

Once, Sri Ramakrishna went to visit the zoo. He saw the lion in a cage and it reminded him of the great goddess Durga and he entered a trance. The seeing of the other animals in the zoo did not fructify. To us the lion reminds of imminent death!



*House of Jayanarayan Bandyopadhyaya*

At another time Sri Ramakrishna saw a European boy standing relaxed under a tree. This awoke in his mind Sri Krishna standing bent in three places, *tribhanga*. The European boy reminds us of just a fair-skinned foreigner.

Whenever Sri Ramakrishna saw a huge gathering of people his mind soared to the thought of Brahman and he lost outer consciousness. A huge crowd awakes in our mind a mob, or some sort of possible agitation to be carefully avoided!

While on a visit to the temple of the goddess at Anur, he became surcharged with a divine emotion and lost outer consciousness. While playing the part of Shiva, he stood still lost in the thought of that great God, Mahadeva. To common folk, there is no difference between one place and another!

On another occasion Vishvambhar's daughter bowed down to him but he did not notice it. Ever in the habit of her pranams being reciprocated by the incarnation of the age, she told

**A** man of strong renunciation seeks nothing but God. He regards the world as a deep well and feels as if he were going to be drowned in it. He looks on his relatives as venomous snakes; ... He never thinks, 'Let me first make some arrangement for my family and then I shall think of God.' He has great inward resolution. —*Gospel*, 166.

him that she had made pranams but there had been no response from him! He said in so many words that he had failed to notice it. Thereupon the little girl did pranams once again. And Sri Ramakrishna bent low before her and touching the ground with his head, bowed to her! No one thinks that there is the Divine Mother in the heart of everyone.

### Shiva Jnane Jiva Seva:

In order to attain the non-dual knowledge, we have been told so long, one should have to renounce the world and the company of men altogether and retire to the forest and mercilessly uproot and throwaway love, devotion and other soft and tender emotions from the heart. Formerly when the aspirant tried to attain that knowledge in the old way, he regarded the whole universe and each person in it as obstacles to the path of religion and contracting therefore a hatred for them, he more often than not went astray. But, from what the Master in ecstasy said today, it is gathered that the Vedanta of the forest can be brought to human habitation and that it can be applied in practice to the work-a-day world. Let man do everything he is doing; there is no harm in that; it is sufficient for him, first, to be fully convinced that it is God who exists, manifested before him as the universe and all the beings in it. Those, with whom he comes in contact every moment of his life, whom he loves, respects and honours, and to whom his sympathy and kindness flow, are all His parts, are all He Himself (818).



This is the association to be set up.

Thus serving the Jivas as Siva, he will have his heart purified and be convinced in a short time that he himself is also a part of God, the eternally pure, awake and free, and bliss Absolute.

‘We get a great light on the path of devotion too from these words of the Master. Until he sees God in all beings, the aspirant has not the remotest chance of realizing true transcendental devotion. If the devout aspirant serves the Jivas as Siva or Narayana, he, it is superfluous to say, will see God in all, attain true devotion and have the aim of his life fulfilled in a short time. Those aspirants who adopt the path of action or that of concentration for the realization of God, will also get much light from these words. For, as embodied beings can never rest for a moment without doing work, it goes without saying that it is only the work of the service of Jivas as Siva that should be performed, and action done in that spirit will enable them to reach the goal sooner than otherwise’ (ibid.).

This is the *seva-yoga* ideal for one who believes in God. Here we consider the personal God as the pointee. To the common run of people, the seeker is just a person begging for something or the other!

Alternatively, one can visualise Brahman in every component of action: the giver, the instrument used for giving, the thing given, and the receiver conceived as fire in the *homa*. Such a person, who sees Brahman in all action, verily attains to Brahman.<sup>63</sup> Here we consider formless Brahman as the pointee.



### **As Long as I Live So Long Do I Learn:**

Sri Ramakrishna's mind is comparable to a sponge which absorbs spiritual lessons by the mere perception of what happens around.

Seeing a circus woman standing on a speeding horse with one leg and jumping every time it passed under a ring and alighting on it again, Sri Ramakrishna praised her repeated practice, *abhyasa*, to attain perfection.

He would see how women behaved when there was bereavement in the family and mimic it. He would imitate a woman seller who would display her ornaments by the wave of her hand when she spoke to the customers. He could generalise the behaviour of women born of their nature.

At Kamarpukur he saw the women of the carpenter families flattening rice with a husking-machine. They are always fearful of the pestle's smashing their fingers; and at the same time they go on nursing their children and bargaining with customers. They say to the customers: 'Pay us what you owe before you leave.'

He noticed women moving about with pitchers on their heads talking to each other but careful lest the pitcher fall down and break. What an amount of alertness and practice was involved! Nothing is impossible for the human mind.

He would talk about how two brothers would fight amongst themselves saying, this side is mine and that side is yours, when in fact the entire world belonged to God alone. Or, when a physician would say that he would cure an ailing child not knowing that it all depended on God's will.

### **The Vedantic Dictum:**

**'Brahman is Real, the Universe is Unreal':**

Hari, later Swami Turiyananda,

paid much attention to the study of the Vedanta at one time. The master loved him on account

of his continence from childhood, devotion, steadfastness and so on. As he applied himself to the study of the Vedanta, meditation, devotional exercises and the like, the friend did not or could not visit the Master as usual for some time. This did not pass unnoticed. One day the Master saw a boy who used to visit him along with our friend, come alone to Dakshineswar and asked him, 'Well, how is it that you come alone; hasn't he come?' The boy said in reply, 'Sir, he has now applied his mind intensely to the study of the Vedanta. He spends night and day in study, discussion and argumentation. It is perhaps because he thinks that time will be wasted, he has not come.' The Master heard this and said nothing more.

The person we are speaking of [Hari], came to Dakshineswar a few days after. As soon as he saw him the Master said, 'Well, I hear you are now given much to the discussion of the Vedanta. That is very good. But does it not amount to this—Brahman is real, the world unreal? Or is it anything else?'

Friend: 'Yes sir, what else can it be?' The friend says that the Master opened his eyes to the import of Vedanta in those few words. Hearing those words he was surprised and thought, 'It is indeed true that everything of the Vedanta is understood when one is convinced in one's heart of hearts of the truth of these few words.'

The Master: 'Hearing, thinking and meditating. First hearing—you at first hear that Brahman is real, the universe unreal; then thinking—by reason and discrimination you get that idea deeply and correctly imprinted

**A** man's ego is destroyed after three croaks, as it were, if he gets into the clutches of a real teacher. But if the teacher is an 'unripe' one, then both the teacher and the disciple undergo endless suffering. The disciple cannot get rid either of his ego or of the shackles of the world.

—*Gospel*, 168.

in your mind; and after that, meditation—you apply your mind to Brahman the real entity, by renouncing the universe, the unreal entity; that is all. Of what avail will it be if one hears and understands this, but does not try to give up what is unreal? It is like the knowledge of the worldly people. One cannot attain Reality by means of that knowledge. Conviction is necessary, renunciation is imperative. It is then alone that one can succeed.<sup>64</sup>

### Do Not Hate Women:

Harinath had led the austere life of a brahmachari even from his early boyhood—bathing in the Ganges every day, cooking his own meals, waking before sunrise, and reciting the Gita from memory before leaving bed. He found in the Master the embodiment of the Vedanta scriptures. Aspiring to be a follower of the ascetic Sankara, he cherished a great hatred for women. One day he said to the Master that he could not allow even small girls to come near him. The Master scolded him and said: ‘You are talking like a fool. Why should you hate women? They are the manifestations of the Divine Mother. Regard them as your own mother and you will never feel their evil

influence. The more you hate them, the more you will fall into their snares.’ Hari said later that these words completely changed his attitude toward women.

The Master knew Hari’s passion for Vedanta. But he did not wish any of his disciples to become a dry ascetic or a mere bookworm. So he asked Hari to practise Vedanta in life by giving up the unreal and following the Real. ‘But it is not so easy,’ Sri Ramakrishna said, ‘to realize the illusoriness of the world. Study alone does not help one very much. The grace of God is required. Mere personal effort is futile. A man is a tiny creature after all, with very limited powers. But he can achieve the impossible if he prays to God for His grace.’ Whereupon the Master sang a song in praise of grace. Hari was profoundly moved and shed tears. Later in life Hari achieved a wonderful synthesis of the ideals of the Personal God and the Impersonal Truth.<sup>65</sup>

### Shashi Interested in Persian Poems:

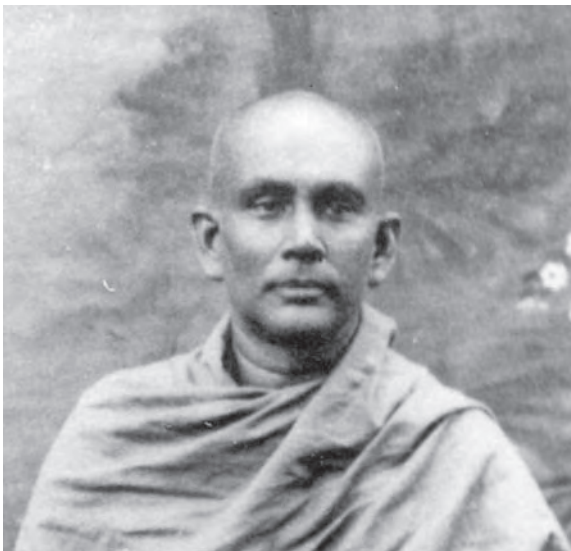
Once Shashi, later Swami Ramakrishnananda, who was serving Sri Ramakrishna did not respond when he was called by Sri Ramakrishna for doing some service. When he came at last, Sri Ramakrishna asked him the cause of the delay and learnt that Shashi was learning Persian to read Sufi poems of devotion. To this Sri Ramakrishna pointed out that if in the name of studies he forgot to do service properly, he would lose what little devotion he had. That was the end of Shashi’s interest in learning Persian. He threw away his books in the Ganges!<sup>66</sup>

### A Child’s Fancy to Practise Other Approaches to Reach the Spiritual Goal

‘Through his devotion to Kali he had worshipped God as his Mother.’<sup>67</sup> He next took up under her guidance the other modes of worship.

Sri Ramakrishna now devoted himself to scaling the most inaccessible and dizzy heights of dualistic worship, namely, the complete union

Swami Turiyananda



with Sri Krishna as the Beloved of the heart. He regarded himself as one of the gopis of Vrindavan, mad with longing for her divine Sweet-heart. At his request Mathur provided him with woman's dress and jewellery. In this love pursuit, food and drink were forgotten. Day and night he wept bitterly. The yearning turned into a mad frenzy; for the divine Krishna began to play with him the old tricks He had played with the gopis. He would tease and taunt, now and then revealing Himself, but always keeping at a distance. Sri Ramakrishna's anguish brought on a return of the old physical symptoms: the burning sensation, an oozing of blood through the pores, a loosening of the joints, and the stopping of physiological functions.

The Vaishnava scriptures advise one to propitiate Radha and obtain her grace in order to realize Sri Krishna. So the tortured devotee now turned his prayer to her. Within a short time he enjoyed her blessed vision. He saw and felt the figure of Radha disappearing into his own body.

He said later on: 'It is impossible to describe the heavenly beauty and sweetness of Radha. Her very appearance showed that she had completely forgotten herself in her passionate attachment to Krishna. Her complexion was a light yellow.'

Now one with Radha, he manifested the great ecstatic love, the Mahabhava which had found in her its fullest expression. Later Sri Ramakrishna said: 'The manifestation in the same individual of the nineteen different kinds of emotion for God is called, in the books on bhakti, Mahabhava. An ordinary man takes a whole lifetime to express even a single one of these. But in this body [meaning himself] there has been a complete manifestation of all nineteen.'

The love of Radha is the precursor of the resplendent vision of Sri Krishna, and Sri Ramakrishna soon experienced that vision. The enchanting form of Krishna appeared to him and merged in his person. He became Krishna;

he totally forgot his own individuality and the world; he saw Krishna in himself and in the universe. Thus he attained to the fulfilment of the worship of the Personal God. He drank from the fountain of Immortal Bliss. The agony of his heart vanished forever. He realized Amrita, Immortality, beyond the shadow of death (25).

Sri Ramakrishna would say that whether one accepts Radha and Krishna as historical characters or not, one ought to appreciate the tremendous love of Radha, the worshipper of *prema*, love towards Krishna, the incarnation of *prema*. One must cultivate this divine love.

### **Vision of Benaras Made of Gold**

The party entered holy Benaras by boat along the Ganges. When Sri Ramakrishna's eyes fell on this city of Siva, where had accumulated for ages the devotion and piety of countless worshippers, he saw it to be made of gold, as the scriptures declare. He was visibly moved. During his stay in the city he treated every particle of its earth with utmost respect. At the Manikarnika Ghat, the great cremation ground of the city, he actually saw Siva, with ash-covered body and tawny matted hair, serenely approaching each funeral pyre and breathing into the ears of the corpses the mantra of liberation; and then the Divine Mother removing from the dead their bonds. Thus he realized the significance of the scriptural statement that anyone dying in Banaras attains salvation through the grace of Siva. He paid a visit to Trailanga Swami, the celebrated monk, whom he later declared to be a real paramahansa, a veritable image of Siva.

A frog had a rupee, which he kept in his hole. One day an elephant was going over the hole, and the frog, coming out in a fit of anger, raised his foot, as if to kick the elephant, and said, 'How dare you walk over my head?' Such is the pride that money begets! —*Gospel*, 169.





Portrait of Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna

Sri Ramakrishna visited Allahabad, at the confluence of the Ganges and the Jamuna, and then proceeded to Vrindavan and Mathura, hal-  
lowed by the legends, songs, and dramas about Krishna and the gopis. Here he had numerous  
visions and his heart overflowed with divine  
emotion. He wept and said: 'O Krishna! Every-  
thing here is as it was in the olden days. You  
alone are absent.' He visited the great woman  
saint Gangamayi, regarded by Vaishnava de-  
votees as the reincarnation of an intimate at-  
tendant of Radha (36).

### **Cure Yourself by Concentration of Mind:**

Pundit Shashadhar one day suggested to the  
Master that the latter could remove the ill-  
ness by concentrating his mind on the throat,  
the scriptures having declared that yogis had  
power to cure themselves in that way. The  
Master rebuked the pundit. 'For a scholar like  
you to make such a proposal!' he said. 'How  
can I withdraw the mind from the Lotus Feet  
of God and turn it to this worthless cage of  
flesh and blood?' 'For our sake at least,' begged

Narendra and the other disciples. 'But,' replied  
Sri Ramakrishna, 'do you think I enjoy this suf-  
fering? I wish to recover, but that depends on  
the Mother.'

Narendra: 'Then please pray to Her. She  
must listen to you.'

Master: 'But I cannot pray for my body.'

Narendra: 'You must do it, for our sake at  
least.'

Master: 'Very well, I shall try.'

A few hours later the Master said to Narendra:  
'I said to Her: "Mother, I cannot swallow food  
because of my pain. Make it possible for me to  
eat a little." She pointed you all out to me and  
said: "What? You are eating enough through all  
these mouths. Isn't that so?" I was ashamed and  
could not utter another word' (69-70).

### **Study of Scriptures for the Beginner**

To a question from a Brahmo devotee, 'Sir, have  
you read the Panchadasi?', Sri Ramakrishna said:

At first one should hear books like that and in-  
dulse in reasoning. But later on—

Cherish my precious Mother Syama  
Tenderly within, O mind;  
May you and I alone behold Her,  
Letting no one else intrude.

One should hear the scriptures during the  
early stages of spiritual discipline. After attain-  
ing God there is no lack of knowledge. Then  
the Divine Mother supplies it without fail. A  
child spells out every word as he writes, but  
later on he writes fluently. The goldsmith is up  
and doing while melting gold. As long as the  
gold hasn't melted, he works the bellows with  
one hand, moves the fan with the other, and  
blows through a pipe with his mouth. But the  
moment the gold melts and is poured into the  
mould, he is relieved of all anxiety. Mere read-  
ing of the scriptures is not enough. A person  
cannot understand the true significance of the  
scriptures if he is attached to the world.

Though with intense delight I learnt many

poems and dramas,  
I have forgotten them all, entrapped in Krishna's  
love (200).

### **States Experienced by Gauranga**

Can one describe the experiences of Gauranga without experiencing them in one's own life?

Sri Ramakrishna says:

Bhakti matured becomes bhava. Next is mahabhava, then prema, and last of all is the attainment of God. Gauranga experienced the states of mahabhava and prema. When prema is awakened, a devotee completely forgets the world; he also forgets his body, which is so dear to a man. Gauranga experienced prema. He jumped into the ocean, thinking it to be the Jamuna. The ordinary jiva does not experience mahabhava or prema. He goes only as far as bhava. But Gauranga experienced all three states. Isn't that so? (255).

The devotee named Navadvip concurred: 'Yes, sir, that is true. The inmost state, the semi-conscious state, and the conscious state' (ibid.). Sri Ramakrishna continued: 'In the inmost state he would remain in samadhi, unconscious of the outer world. In the semi-conscious state he could only dance. In the conscious state he chanted the name of God' (ibid.).

Navadvip said: 'Previously one hardly saw a copy of the Vedas in this country. Max Muller has translated them; so people can now read these books' (ibid.). Sri Ramakrishna warned: 'Too much study of the scriptures does more harm than good. The important thing is to know the essence of the scriptures. After that, what is the need of books? One should learn the essence and then dive deep in order to realize God' (ibid.).

### **Divine Mother's Revelation**

Sri Ramakrishna observed: 'The Divine Mother has revealed to me the essence of the Vedanta.

It is that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory. The essence of the Gita is what you get by repeating the word ten times. The word becomes reversed. It is then "tagi", which refers to renunciation. The essence of the Gita is: "O man, renounce everything and practise spiritual discipline for the realization of God"' (255).

To a devotee named Navadvip, who confessed his inability to renounce Sri Ramakrishna said:

You are a goswami. It is your duty to officiate as priest in the temple. You cannot renounce the world; otherwise, who would look after the temple and its services? You have to renounce mentally. It is God Himself who has kept you in the world to set an example to men. You may resolve in your mind a thousand times to renounce the world, but you will not succeed. God has given you such a nature that you must perform your worldly duties. Krishna said to Arjuna: 'What do you mean, you will not fight? By your mere will you cannot desist from fighting. Your very nature will make you fight' (ibid.).

### **The Purpose of Reading Scriptures**

'A nail-knife suffices to kill oneself. One needs sword and shield to kill others. That is the purpose of the sastras [scriptures]. One doesn't really need to study the different scriptures. If one has no discrimination, one doesn't achieve anything through mere scholarship, even though one studies all the six systems of philosophy. Call on God, crying to Him secretly in solitude. He will give all that you need' (292).

**H**e who has attained God keeps only an appearance of ego; there remains in him only a semblance of anger and lust. He becomes like a child. A child has no attachment to the three gunas—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. He becomes as quickly detached from a thing as he becomes attached to it.

—*Gospel*, 171.

### **Where to Concentrate During Meditation**

Once Manilal asked Sri Ramakrishna: 'Well, what is the rule for concentration? Where should one concentrate?' To that Sri Ramakrishna replied:

The heart is a splendid place. One can meditate there or in the Sahasrara. These are rules for meditation given in the scriptures. But you may meditate wherever you like. Every place is filled with Brahman-Consciousness. Is there any place where It does not exist? Narayana, in Vali's presence, covered with two steps the heavens, the earth, and the interspaces. Is there then any place left uncovered by God? A dirty place is as holy as the bank of the Ganges. It is said that the whole creation is the Virat, the Universal Form of God (403).

### **Conclusion**

#### **Faith is the One Essential Thing:**

The faith that we have in something or someone is based on our own judgement in respect of it, and this reliance on our judgement presupposes our faith in ourselves. For, if we do not have faith in ourselves, how can we rely on our judgements? We must have faith in the name of God. Sri Ramakrishna's story of Vibhishana writing the name of Sri Rama on a leaf and asking a person to walk without fear on the ocean only to get drowned when the man opened and saw that what the leaf contained was just the characters that constituted Sri Rama. When faith was lost, he drowned.<sup>68</sup>

A mother told her son to call on Madhusudan, the elder, if he became afraid in the path to his school that led through a forest. This resulted in his actually seeing Sri Krishna because of the simple faith of the child.<sup>69</sup> The story of the milkmaid who could walk over the river and deliver milk regularly and on time, irrespective of the spate in the river and the non-availability of the boatman, merely by taking the name of God on the chastisement of the guru stating that it

should be no difficult task when people cross the ocean of the samsara by repeating the name of God.<sup>70</sup>

#### **The Name of God and God are the Same**

When one is called by name, we see that one responds to the call. We see that a letter reaches the addressee by simply writing the address without requiring us to physically hand it over to the addressee. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi used to say that perfection is achieved through the repetition of God's holy name. She used to advise everyone to repeat the name of God and hold on to God. We must also have the unshakeable faith that we shall realise God in this very life and not in a postmortem existence. Swami Ranganathananda always stressed the word, *ibhaiva*, here and now. He used to say that success in spiritual life is achieved inwardly through meditation and outwardly through service to human beings in the spirit of worship of God.

#### **Dive deep: This is the Mandate**

There is no point in merely floating on the surface, if we like to gain access to the innumerable invaluable pearls lying at the bottom of the lake. In the beginning, much time is spent in stabilising the mind and very little time is profitably used to dwell on God, God's name, God's human form, divine play, and infinite background. So, one should go on practising and praying simultaneously for divine grace so that we may progress in spiritual life overcoming all the obstacles. From one point of view God realisation depends on the grace of God. One can never dictate terms and conditions to God on God's bestowal of grace. But for this grace to descend on us we have to put in self-effort. Else, He will be blamed for partiality! And again, can one take for granted divine grace without concomitant self-effort? Being pleased with our self-effort despite knowing our limited capacity to scale maya, God bestows grace when the time is propitious.



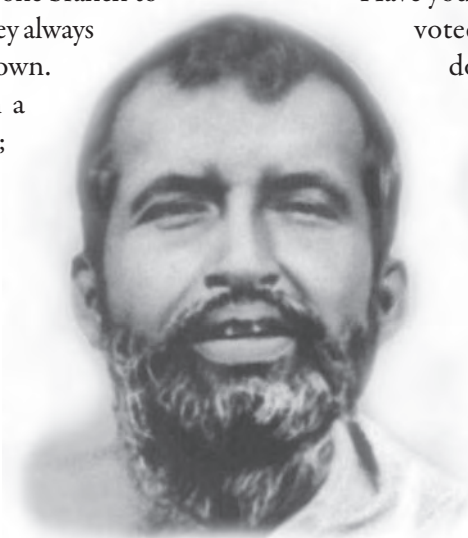
### **Lift the Anchor and Then Row the Boat**

No amount of God's grace can take the boat of life forward if the anchor had not been lifted and the sail kept unfurled. Recall, the Bengali song: 'Stay within the chamber of one's heart and do not go hither and thither; whatever you need, you will find it here.' In the grinder used by village folk, the grain that does not stray from the axle does not get pulverised by the revolving stones. So too, if we hold on to God, we shall be able to scathe through all troubles and tribulations with ease. Sri Ramakrishna used to tell about the kitten and monkey approaches. The monkey holds on to its mother and the mother jumps from one branch to another with the child monkey always facing the risk of falling down.

This is the case also when a child holds the father's hand; if he sees something exciting, he may let go of his hold and fall down and hurt himself. The kitten on the other hand only mews and the mother cat knows where to take her little one. So too, if the father holds the hand of the child, there is no fear of the child falling.

### ***Vishayananda, Bhajananda, Brahmananda***

The human mind, experience the joy of sense pleasures (*vishayananda*); to meet its own specific needs, it sees this Consciousness as various forms of Gods and Goddesses too and enjoys the joy of devotion (*bhajananda*). And so, there is really no polytheism in Hinduism; it is the one Reality appearing in diverse ways. There are, in addition, special manifestations of this Consciousness from age to age as Incarnations of God. Further, one experiences the bliss of Brahman (*brahmananda*) in *samadhi*.<sup>71</sup>



### **The Aspirations of a True Devotee**

What are the aspirations of a true devotee of God? He does not want anything in return from his beloved. The Gita says: 'With minds fixed on me, with lives dedicated to me, enlightening each other, and always speaking of me, they derive satisfaction and rejoice.'<sup>72</sup> It also says: 'Having your mind fixed on me, be devoted to me, sacrifice to me, and bow down to me. By concentrating your mind and accepting me as the supreme goal, you shall surely attain me who am thus the Self' (9.34). With a little variation we have another message:


'Have your mind fixed on me, be my devotee, sacrifice unto me, and bow down to me. Thus you will come to me alone. This truth do I promise to you. For, you are dear to me' (18.65). It is also said: 'O son of Kunti, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as a sacrifice, whatever you give, and whatever austerities you undertake, all that you offer to me' (9.27).

In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* we have several references to a conversation between Radha and Yashoda. When Sri Krishna went to Mathura, Yashoda came to Radha, who was absorbed in meditation. Afterwards Radha said to Yashoda: "Krishna is Chidatma, Absolute Consciousness, and I am Chitsakti, the Primal Power. Ask a boon of Me. Yasoda said: "I don't want Brahmanjana. Please grant me only this: that I

**W**hat is there in mere scholarship? God can be attained by crying to Him with a longing heart. There is no need to know many things. —*Gospel*, 180.

may see the form of Gopala in my meditation; that I may always have the company of Krishna's devotees; that I may always serve the devotees of God; that I may always chant God's name and glories."<sup>73</sup> The crux of it is to fix the mind somehow on God.

### Are We Dear to God?

We like to hold that *God is very dear to us*. We should also find out *who is dear to God* and behave in such a way as to become extremely dear to God. If there is anything most disliked by incarnations including Sri Ramakrishna, it is *ahamkara*. The Holy Mother said: '*Nirvasana*, desirelessness is everything.' And the scriptures warn us not to enter the forest of sense-objects. 

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11. *Isha Upanishad*, 7.
12. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 3.8.10.
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25. *Vivekachudamani*, 278.
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68. See ‘The Doubting Soul Perishes’, *Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1947), 171.

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*Sri. M.: ‘There is a round hole in the wall. Through it one is able to see part of the meadow on the other side of the wall. Likewise, through you [Sri Ramakrishna] one sees part of the Infinite God’ (Gospel, 839).*







# Grace in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

Pravrajika Shuddhatmaprana

ALL OF US WANT GOD'S GRACE, but how do we get it? Is grace earned? Is it dependent on our spiritual practices or on certain conditions? Or is it beyond all laws and conditions? The debate goes on. Can we find any answers or clues in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*?

We sometimes hear that nothing can happen without the grace of God. In one place Ramakrishna goes so far as to say: 'Bondage and liberation are both of [the Divine Mother's] making. By Her maya worldly people become entangled in "woman and gold", and again, through Her grace they attain their liberation.'<sup>1</sup> And in another place he makes this act of grace sound completely whimsical: 'God has the nature of a child. A child is sitting with gems in the skirt of his cloth. Many a person passes by him along the road. Many of them pray to him for gems. But he hides the gems with his hands and says, turning away his face, "No, I will not give any away." But another man comes along. He doesn't ask for the

gems, and yet the child runs after him and offers him the gems, begging him to accept them' (769).

According to Ramakrishna, even to turn our mind towards God, we need God's grace. As he said, 'One thinks of God through His grace.' (817) Again: 'The mind can disentangle itself from worldliness if, through [the Divine Mother's] grace, She makes it turn toward Herself' (137).

Well, if all this sounds a bit disheartening, you can think of it this way: You probably would not have started reading an article like this if you had not already received some grace from the Lord. So you've got a good start.

But this is not the end. From a study of the *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, we find that grace is multilayered. It is normally not a simple, one-time-only experience. After we have gotten a start by getting the Lord's grace to turn our mind towards Him, then we have to take it further. Our goal, after all, is the realization of God, so this is the ultimate grace we are seeking. Though in the above comments Ramakrishna may seem to hint that everything is predestined, we can see from other things he says that this is not at all

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the case. In fact, we find in the *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* many places where he clearly presents us ways in which we can obtain God's grace.

For instance, once when someone asked, 'How does one receive the grace of God?', he replied, 'Constantly you have to chant the name and glories of God and give up worldly thoughts as much as you can. ... The thing is that one must love God. Through intense love one attains the vision of Him' (375). And, 'One attains God through japa. By repeating the name of God secretly and in solitude one receives divine grace' (588). 'A man does not have to suffer any more if God, in His grace, removes his doubts and reveals Himself to him. But this grace descends upon him only after he has prayed to God with intense yearning of heart and practised spiritual discipline' (116).

Again, 'God bestows His grace on the devotee who has this faith of a child' (865). And, 'Unless a man is guileless, he doesn't receive the grace of God' (539).

In another place Ramakrishna says that Ravana's brother Bibhishana was able to receive the grace of Rama because he had the quality of *sattva* (861). And again: 'One receives the grace of God by subduing the passions—lust, anger, and greed. Then one sees God' (161).

There are many other examples like this, but let's go over this again and see what we have here: In short, we need to: constantly chant the name and glories of God; have intense love for Him; perform japa in solitude and secrecy; pray with intense yearning of heart and perform spiritual practices; have the faith of a child; be guileless; acquire the quality of *sattva*; and subdue the passions.

Obviously some of these practices overlap, yet even then this may all seem overwhelming. But if we think about it, we can understand that the practice of just one or two of these disciplines can ultimately lead to the attainment of the rest.

There are many examples in the *Gospel* where

Ramakrishna bestowed grace on a person. Here we shall look at one incident and try to understand if there was something that motivated this sudden blessing.

On Thursday, 27 August 1885, Pundit Shyamapada Bhattacharya of Antpur arrived at Dakshineswar (836–7). He was a very learned man, having the title of Nyayavagish. After first coming to Ramakrishna's room to meet him, the pundit then went to the bank of the Ganga to perform his evening spiritual practices. M. tells us that while the pundit was doing his practices, 'he had some amazing visions' (ibid.). He then returned to the Master's room. Meanwhile, Ramakrishna himself 'had just finished meditation and the chanting of the holy names' (ibid.). He was obviously pleased to see the pundit, as he pointed to him and said to M., 'He is very nice' (ibid.).

Ramakrishna began the conversation by saying, 'Where the mind attains peace by practising the discipline of "Neti, neti" [that is, "not this, not this"], there Brahman is' (ibid.). He then illustrated it with the example of a visitor to a palace passing through seven gates to reach the king. Perhaps the Master was saying to the pundit, 'You have gone so far; now go further'. When Pundit Shyamapada replied, 'One sees God beyond the realm of *maya*,' the Master agreed, but then added that after realizing God, one ultimately sees that everything is God—'*maya*, the universe, and all living beings' (ibid.).

After this, Ramakrishna seemed to test the pundit. He said: 'What will you gain by the mere study of scriptures? The pundits merely indulge

**T**he bound souls never think of God. If they get any leisure they indulge in idle gossip and foolish talk, or they engage in fruitless work. If you ask one of them the reason, he answers, 'Oh, I cannot keep still; so I am making a hedge.' When time hangs heavy on their hands they perhaps start playing cards. —*Gospel*, 87.

in reasoning' (ibid.). This was a point that Ramakrishna often made—that pundits may know what the scriptures say, but they do not always put the teachings in practice. However, instead of feeling offended, Shyamapada replied in all humility, 'I hate the idea of being called a pundit.' 'That is due to the grace of God,' replied Ramakrishna, acknowledging that he believed the pundit's answer to be sincere, and that he did not have the pride of scholarship that most pundits had, due to some grace bestowed on him (ibid.).

The conversation then returned to the idea that it 'is Narayana Himself who has become everything', and that 'God alone has become the universe and its living beings' (ibid.). At each point Shyamapada recited a hymn from the scriptures in support of what the Master said. And at each point both of them became delighted with the other's response. It seems their hearts were united, as the pundit was able to feel Ramakrishna's mood and respond to it accordingly.

At last, when Shyamapada recited a hymn from the Bhagavata, praising Krishna as the Lord and indwelling Self within everything, Ramakrishna went into samadhi. In this state, while standing, he placed one of his feet on Shyamapada's lap and then on his chest. M. also told us that Ramakrishna was smiling. In the Hindu tradition, the feet of a deity represent the deity itself. And if the devotee has any claim on the Lord at all, it is the Lord's feet that are claimed first and foremost, for this is where the power of the deity lies. Again, it is the Lord's feet where the devotee offers his head, for this is the sign of his humility and surrender. And finally, it is in the Lord's feet where the devotee becomes one with the Lord. Thus, it seems that Ramakrishna was offering himself and all his blessings to the pundit.

Then, as proof of what a truly worthy recipient Shyamapada was, the pundit immediately responded to this extraordinary grace by holding

Ramakrishna's foot and praying, 'O Guru! Please give me God-consciousness' (ibid.). To have such grace given so suddenly and unexpectedly, and to give that as your immediate response, shows where the pundit's heart really was. Such a prayer could not remain unfulfilled. His sole desire—his innermost, heartfelt desire—was for the Lord. A worthy recipient indeed.

As if to acknowledge this, Ramakrishna said to M. after the pundit had left: 'Don't you see that what I have said is coming to pass? Those who have sincerely practised meditation and japa must come here' (ibid.). Previously the Master had acknowledged the pundit's 'very nice' personality, and also his humility. But here, Ramakrishna not only acknowledged the pundit's spiritual practices, but also the sincerity with which he did them.

Sincerity is the key here. As we see with Pundit Shyamapada, his total sincerity and earnestness in his spiritual practices, and his lack of egotism, made him ready for the Lord's grace, and it immediately came. His lack of egotism had, in fact, made his heart united with the Master's heart. Again, he truly wanted the Lord's grace.

However, again and again we find the objection: If grace is really grace, it should not depend on anything, such as the spiritual practices that Shyamapada did. It should be unconditional. And here again we find that Ramakrishna is in agreement. He says: 'Is anything impossible for the grace of God?' (703) And: 'Through His grace even the impossible becomes possible' (293). So from this it seems God can bestow His grace on whomever He wants, without any conditions, such as spiritual practices, yearning, renunciation, and so on.

So how do we reconcile these two apparently irreconcilable positions? I think Ramakrishna would agree with St. Bernard, who wrote: 'Grace is necessary to salvation, free will equally so, but



grace in order to *give* salvation, free will in order to *receive* it. Therefore we should not attribute part of the good work to grace and part to free will; it is performed in its entirety by the common and inseparable action of both; entirely by grace, entirely by free will, but springing from the first in the second.<sup>2</sup>

It is almost like saying that grace and self-effort are two sides of the same coin. And we can see how this is possible if we remember that our self-effort to realise God is itself dependent on God's grace.

So yes, God can bestow his grace on whom-ever he wants at any time, but can we receive it? Do we want it? Quoting from a Vaishnava saying, Ramakrishna once said: 'Though one has received the grace of God, of Guru, and of a good devotee, yet the Jiva [soul] meets with destruction through the lack of the grace of [a fourth] one.' Then he added: 'One might have been fortunate enough to receive all these triple forms of grace, yet if one's own heart shows no grace to itself—if it has no yearning to save itself—they are of no avail.'<sup>3</sup>

Many of us sincerely pray for the Lord's grace, but how many of us are actually ready to receive it *now*? Perhaps behind our prayer for His grace is the thought: 'Next month would be a good time for me, Lord—or, better still, a few months from now, after my vacation. But I really want it, Lord.' We would rather make an appointment with God for it. But when that time comes we would probably postpone it further. Why? Inwardly we fear God's grace because we fear our own extinction, which is actually the extinction of our ego. Yet, this is what our spiritual practices are ultimately for—to reduce the ego that keeps us from the Lord and His grace. Grace is always flowing; we are the ones who block it.

'Is it an easy thing to receive the grace of God?' said Ramakrishna. 'One must altogether renounce egotism; one cannot see God as long as one feels, "I am the doer." Suppose, in a family, a

man has taken charge of the store-room; then if someone asks the master, "Sir, will you yourself kindly give me something from the store-room", the master says to him: "There is already someone in the store-room. What can I do there?" God doesn't easily appear in the heart of a man who feels himself to be his own master. But God can be seen the moment His grace descends.'<sup>4</sup>



Sri M. at Baranagar Math on  
30 January 1887

So basically, all the previous disciplines that Ramakrishna had mentioned are meant to lead us to the renunciation of the ego and self-surrender to God, which enable us to receive His grace. As Ramakrishna would put it: 'The breeze of [God's] grace is blowing day and night over your head. Unfurl the sails of your boat (mind), if you want to make rapid progress through the ocean of life.'<sup>5</sup>

'Unfurl the sails' means to let go—let go of the ego and surrender. Then the Lord's grace can enter.

So all this sounds perfectly reasonable. But is God always that reasonable?

Girish Ghosh once made a strong case that grace could be given and also received—that is, it could transform the devotee—without any effort on the devotee's part. On Friday, April 16, 1886, Girish asked the Master why his mind did not

**A**lways keep your mind fixed on God. In the beginning you must struggle a little; later on you will enjoy your pension  
—*Gospel*, 210.

remain on a lofty plane. ‘Why does it come down again?’ he asked. And Ramakrishna replied that this was the nature of the mind ‘when one leads a worldly life’. He then went on to describe the difference between one who leads a worldly life and one who has renounced everything.

At this point Girish left the room, and Ramakrishna said to M., as if by way of explanation, ‘A man needs the grace of God to fix his whole mind on Him.’ In other words, it is not as easy as Girish thought. When Girish returned shortly after, the Master resumed the conversation, referring to a person who could live in the world but not be stained by it, like a mudfish who can live in the mud but not have a trace of mud on its body.

Girish: ‘Sir, I don’t understand all this. You can make everyone pure and unattached if you want to. You can make everyone good, whether he is a worldly man or a sannyasi. The Malaya breeze, I believe, turns all trees into sandal-wood.’

Master: ‘Not unless there is substance in them. There are a few trees, the cotton-tree for instance, which are not turned into sandal-wood.’

Girish: ‘I don’t care.’

Master: ‘But this is the law.’

Girish: ‘But everything about you is illegal.’ [M. adds here that the devotees were sitting there amazed at this conversation.]


Master: ‘Yes, that may be true. When the river of bhakti overflows, the land all around is flooded with water to the depth of a pole.’<sup>6</sup>

So what does all this mean? Ramakrishna himself would, in the normal state of consciousness, never identify himself with God, the Bestower of grace—even though, as we have seen with Pundit Shyamapada, he could bestow grace in a state of samadhi. But here, as Girish’s faith was so strong, it drew out this confession from him: Yes, I *can* bestow grace on whomever I wish, regardless of their circumstances—and, moreover, they can receive it also.

So yes, in the domain of God illegal things sometimes take place. God *can* break His own law. But then, as Ramakrishna indicates, it all has to do with the fact that God is the indwelling Self within everyone—that it is God who *sees* Himself everywhere and in everything. ‘God alone has become the universe and its living beings,’ as he said to Pundit Shyamapada.

‘The land all around is flooded with water. ...’ This is the flood of divine love. This is the divine loving the divine. So there *are* magic moments when all barriers are broken.

But ... can we afford to just sit and wait for a magic moment that may or may not come? If we really want that grace, why not take the path of sadhana, as Pundit Shyamapada did? As we find with Shyamapada, divine grace came freely, but he was able to receive it—and he was ready to receive it—because of his spiritual practices. And Ramakrishna recognised this.

Yet we also see that it was when Shyamapada’s heart became united with Ramakrishna’s that the flood of grace poured in. At that moment it was the divine loving the divine. And here we also see that when God’s grace does come—even after years (perhaps) of sadhana and yearning—that moment will still be a magic moment. This is because grace will always be beyond all laws. It will always be *ahaituki*—causeless, unaccountable, beyond all understanding. 

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# What Makes the Gospel Unique?

Pravrajika Virajaprana

THE OBVIOUS ANSWER is Sri Ramakrishna himself. Every aspect of the Master, Sri Ramakrishna, was unique: his spiritual practices, spiritual experiences, state of *bhavamukha*, and unlettered, unsophisticated personality in a materialistic-saturated world. He walked the path which culminated in his statement about himself: ‘The spiritual experiences of this place have surpassed even the Vedas and Vedanta.’<sup>1</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna’s approach to Truth was simple and direct, uncluttered by all the formalities of dogmas, doctrines, and creeds—he reached the summit of spiritual life by following the disciplines of different religions through his purity, sincerity, devotion and passionate longing for God. Whatever religious idea and corresponding practice he took up, he completely identified with. While following different religious traditions, seekers from those traditions would be attracted to him. He never read or studied books. He once said that he listened to many scriptures, then made a garland of their knowledge, put it round his neck and offered it to the Mother. His intense yearning was sufficient for his exploration into the infinite world of transcendent and immanent Reality. Sri Ramakrishna is the only known spiritual master who, discovering the underlying identity of all religions, emphasised

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their harmony and found that when followed sincerely, they lead to the same God, who is indicated by various names. He often gave the example of a dyer who dyed customers’ cloths the colour of their choice. One savvy person observed that no matter what colour had been requested, the dyer dipped the cloth in the same vat, which produced a variety of colours. The formless Brahman, Sri Ramakrishna explained, is like that vat of dye—itself colourless yet producing all colours.

After remaining for an unprecedented six months in *nirvikalpa samadhi*, an exalted state



from which any other person other than a prophet with a divine mission or incarnation of God would have dropped the body after twenty-one days, he received the mysterious command from the Divine Mother at least three times<sup>2</sup> to remain in *bhavamukha*, the state midway between the relative, the *lila*, or divine play, and the *nitya*, the formless, attributeless absolute. This ability to move freely between these two states of consciousness has been explained in detail in *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*, '*Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master*,' by Swami Saradananda, a direct monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and a knower of God, who proclaimed in all humility regarding *samadhi* and other higher states of consciousness that he had not written about anything that he had not experienced himself.<sup>3</sup> We cannot find such a claim from any other authentic source regarding this inexplicable state of being. 'Bhavamukha is a new expression unknown to religious texts in Sanskrit, and is for the first time given out by the Master himself.'<sup>4</sup>

Possessing this unique ability, Sri Ramakrishna was able to remain on our plane of existence for the benefit of humanity. He explained this by way of an analogy. Imagine a vast enclosure surrounded by a high wall. Several people walking along the encircling road are attracted by delightful sounds arising from within the enclosure. They climb up, look over the wall; then completely enthralled by what they see and hear they jump in without a second thought. And that's it. They never come out. But there are magnanimous souls who, after ascending the wall and peeping over it, climb back down to share with others their wonderful experience.

Sri Ramakrishna's experiences supersede what is mentioned in the doctrines of classical Advaita Vedanta. He introduced the term *vijnana*, representing the whole of Reality, and *vijnani*, as the

one who experiences this truth. One of the keys to understanding Sri Ramakrishna's uniqueness as depicted in the *Gospel* is his immersion in this divine *lila*, God's play. Rather than rejecting the world as unreal, as only an appearance, he perceived the entire universe as the sportive play of the divine. As he reiterated in so many different ways, from various angles, the whole universe is a manifestation of this play. All is true; nothing is false. Through ignorance what we take to be the world with all its multifarious objects, both sentient and insentient, and what we call humanity, are only so many manifestations of the same Being. In every analogy, metaphor, simile, illustration, or story we can find the truth that Sri Ramakrishna is proclaiming transparently reflected in his life and personality. He was one with the Truth he spoke about. Therefore contemplating his words gives us direct access to who he was.

'Sri Ramakrishna plunged deep into the spiritual realm and many doors, not ordinarily accessible to all spiritual seekers, were opened to him.'<sup>5</sup> He saw God face to face, spoke to Him, lived, moved and had his being in that supreme Reality. His divine mission was to open the door to Truth for us so that we could discover our real nature. His inspiring message throughout the *Gospel* can be summed up in four words: 'God can be seen.'

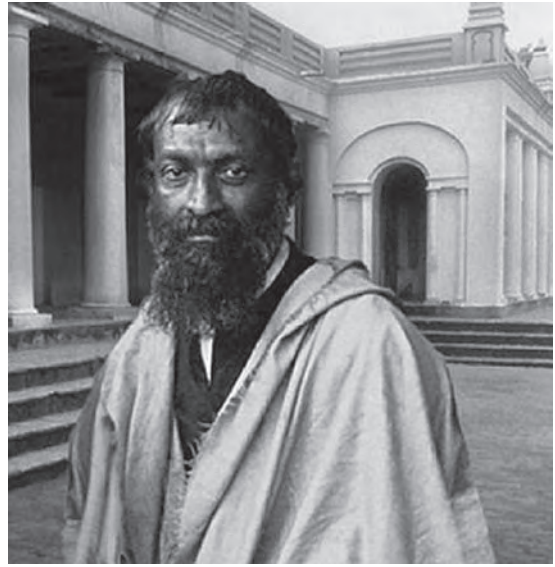
The second factor that makes *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, unique is the compiler, Mahendra Nath Gupta, known as M., and the circumstances that led to its compilation. When he met the Master, who was then forty-six years old, M. was in a desperate mental state, struggling with a major crisis in his life which led him to contemplate suicide. At this juncture Sri Ramakrishna would live only another four years; he was ready to give the fruits of his realizations to humanity. This was not a coincidental meeting. The Divine Mother seems to have orchestrated this coming together for her

own purposes. M. was divinely ordained for this task, though this was initially unknown to him.

The *Gospel* is an extraordinary account of Sri Ramakrishna's life spanning this four-year period, 1882–1886, while he was living in the Dakshineswar temple garden. M. was enchanted with Sri Ramakrishna who completely turned his life around. He began visiting Sri Ramakrishna regularly; memorizing his words to reinforce on his mind the deep spiritual impressions he was receiving. After returning home, he would make terse notes of his visits and conversations then meditate for hours and sometimes for days, recalling and accurately recording everything he saw and heard. In this way he would expand his notes including all of the details surrounding a particular day spent in the Master's presence.

Recorded in a personal diary, M's eyewitness account of these intimate details of the Master's daily life and conversations provide a rare insight into his vibrant personality, his sublime spiritual states and direct experiences of super-conscious divine moods. Having formed the habit of keeping a diary many years beforehand as a student, M. was initially interested in writing his diary only for his own recollection and personal sadhana. He had no intention of ever publishing it.

As a close disciple and an astute observer, endowed with a photographic memory, M's account is based on firsthand evidence and the keen memory of one who knew Sri Ramakrishna intimately. M. was present during all the conversations he recorded in the *Gospel*. This is the first time in religious history that the words of such a great spiritual master have been recounted so meticulously. Western-educated and a brilliant reporter, M. was skilled in portraying visual images through words. His unusual literary genius coupled with a poetic imagination and artistic temperament transports the reader, as it were,



Sri Mahendranath Gupta, M.

to the temple garden where Sri Ramakrishna's divine play was being enacted and which M. was keenly observing. The entire drama: Sri Ramakrishna's exalted states, the devotees who surrounded him, the scenes depicting the temple compound, with its various temples and gardens redolent with fragrant flowers and the Ganga flowing nearby, other places Sri Ramakrishna visited, and the songs that were sung—all vividly come to life. The living atmosphere M. has created provides an ideal backdrop for the rare opportunity he has given us of having the Master's holy company.

Nagendra Nath Gupta, who also knew Sri Ramakrishna personally, wrote:

**Y**ou see, sin flies away when love of God grows in a man's heart ... But one cannot love God if one feels attracted to worldly things, to 'woman and gold'. Merely taking the vow of monastic life will not help a man if he is attached to the world. It is like swallowing your own spittle after spitting it out on the ground.—*Gospel*, 224.



A Leaf from the Diary of M. and  
the Ink Pot in Writing the Kathamrita

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa* is a record taken at firsthand. ... There is no room for imagination or exaggeration in anything that concerns Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Much about the earlier prophets is wrapped in uncertainty and speculation. There are no real likenesses of Buddha, Christ, and Chaitanya. Ramakrishna's photographs are available everywhere. His spoken words are available to all almost just as he uttered them.<sup>6</sup>

M. had a significant role in this drama of conveying Sri Ramakrishna's profound message. Spiritually inclined, M. was preeminently qualified to be his scribe. The Master reinterpreted the ancient spiritual ideal for the modern world, emphasizing the need for spiritual experience, the divinity of humankind, and the harmony of all religions and also gave simple instructions for the practices necessary for this realization.<sup>7</sup> Sri Ramakrishna said that his divinity was concealed like a band of minstrels who suddenly appears, dancing and singing, and then vanishes from sight. They come and go but no one recognises them. M. was the perfect counterpoint to this disguise, connecting this simple, humble God-man with today's sophisticated world, East and West.

Sri Ramakrishna, knowing the future value of M.'s diary, encouraged M. to note down his

words and then would ask him to repeat instructions and conversations to make sure that he had understood and recorded them accurately. If necessary, he would correct or clarify his teachings. When some other disciples such as Swami Shivananda began taking notes, the Master told him that it was unnecessary, indicating that there was already a man designated for recording his words (144). M. recalled, 'Once the Master said to me: "The Divine Mother has told me that you have to do a little work for her."<sup>8</sup>

Even with the limitations of language, M. was able to relay some idea of the Master's deep mystical realizations. He also captured the Master's straightforward thoughts through his original, charming utterances and teachings. Sri Ramakrishna always used common everyday village examples and illustrations to convey the highest truths. He has made spiritual life and practice so simple, making God easily accessible to all. Everything about him was guileless and pure; M. captured this childlike innocence throughout his diary. In this way the Master resembled the much-loved and admired sixteenth century Spanish mystic, St Teresa of Avila whose colourful expressions were those of the people—she also used homely examples from her daily life and observations. Any word in common usage was good enough for her.

The conversational format of the *Gospel* imbues it with a sweet informality and spontaneity not to be found in other accounts of Sri Ramakrishna; hence the title M. gave: *Kathamrita*, nectarine, sweet words. In and through all the teachings given in the *Gospel* through his conversations, a clear picture of Sri Ramakrishna is disclosed. All his experiences which had accumulated throughout his years of intense sadhana are revealed through his words, which carry the immediacy of the all-pervading divine Reality. Day and night he was lost in God-consciousness. Those who were fortunate enough to witness his



God-intoxicated state and divine moods that kept him absorbed in blissful awareness could form some idea of what it means to live in God. Thanks to M., the rest of us have the *Gospel*.

M. once said that a spiritual mood was the natural state of Sri Ramakrishna's mind. Although he tried to keep his mind at the phenomenal level for the sake of others, the intensity of his experiences would elevate him to the highest levels of consciousness, but when his mind returned to this relative world, he found everything was infused with divine consciousness as well. 'Sometimes,' he said, 'I find that the universe is saturated with the consciousness of God, as the earth is soaked with water in the rainy season.'<sup>9</sup> When a God-man or woman speaks so convincingly and beautifully about such a profound vision, that experience resonates deeply within spiritual seekers.

It certainly resonated with M. who was absorbed in Ramakrishna-consciousness. Because of this, his dedicated efforts resulted in the *Gospel*. After Sri Ramakrishna's *mahasamadhi*, Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother, convinced M. to publish his diary. She paid him the highest tribute when she wrote to him: 'All that you have recorded is true. One day when I was listening to what you had recorded, I thought that he [Sri Ramakrishna] himself was speaking.'<sup>10</sup> Holy Mother knew that the *Gospel* would benefit humanity and that M. was destined to make the Master's life-giving message available to all. Swami Vivekananda was also deeply impressed with M.'s clarity, humility, and objectivity. He wrote to him: 'The move is quite original and never was the life of a great Teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind, as you are presenting this one.'<sup>11</sup>

M.'s personality remained completely hidden within the pages of the *Gospel*. Though he has recorded his reactions and responses at times, it is a purely objective analysis as if he were speaking about someone else other than himself. Instead of

distracting the reader, his soliloquies, asides, and comments complement and embellish the narration. M. avoided interpreting Sri Ramakrishna's words; further, he never changed or paraphrased them. Recognizing their divine source, he considered them as mantras to be meditated upon.

We are deeply indebted to M. for accomplishing the 'little work' that the Divine Mother had in store for him—he has brought the Master to life in such a realistic way, it's as if we are right there in his room in Dakshineswar hearing his sweet uplifting words untouched by the passage of time.



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It is not possible to develop ecstatic love of God unless you love Him very deeply and regard Him as your very own.  
—*Gospel*, 229.



# ***Significance of the Spiritual Experiences Revealed in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna***

**Swami Muktidananda**

**S**RI RAMAKRISHNA'S LIFE, which is full of varieties of mystical divine experiences, is a testimony which clearly and convincingly explains to the doubting human mind all about God and God experience. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, a unique book, containing the revelations of Sri Ramakrishna and his spiritual experiences is a treasury of the authentic record

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of God experience carefully recorded by his faithful and devoted evangelist Sri Mahendranath Gupta, a learned devotee and a close companion of Sri Ramakrishna, who is known by his pen name as 'M.'. He, out of utter humility chose to announce his identity in such abridged single alphabet as 'M.' to obscure his individuality.

Existence of God and the experience of God has been the search of mankind from time immemorial. Does God exist? Can we experience God? What are the conditions internal and

external which enable one to experience God? These are the basic questions usually asked to understand the real purpose of religion.

The most significant and much needed aspect of religion is God experience. The varieties of mystical experiences of the divine revealed by saints, godmen, and incarnations are the central focus and the basis of religion. However, the real spiritual experience is so very rare. The world is hungering to know about the spiritual experiences of the spiritual masters of all religions. However, conventional religions of the world appear like a big mass of traditions, commandments, dicta, rituals, modes of worship, and philosophical theses, and such other secondary and tertiary details of religion, and are like huge mountains of sponge, squeezing of which will not even give a few drops of water of authentic spiritual experience of God. Here comes the importance of the spiritual book like the *Gospel*, in which are recorded Sri Ramakrishna's conversations with precision, authenticity, and without any interpolation with necessary descriptions of the circumstances, time, and the date, by the recorder 'M'.

As Sri Ramakrishna lived close to our times, and as his life has been observed and narrated with all the necessary details by his intimate disciple Sri M., during his visits to Dakshineswar, where the great Master lived, no shadow of doubt can arise about what is being recorded by M. in the *Gospel*. All the conversations recorded in the *Gospel* are the result of the notes that Sri. M. made in his diaries, from his outstanding photographic memory. These diaries, originally written in Bengali, have been preserved till date. They therefore have the status of a stenographic record. The house in Kolkata, where Sri M. lived, wrote these diaries, and also preserved them, has been now transformed into 'Kathamrita Bhavan', a memorial in his honour of the recorder of the *Gospel*.

The mystical experiences of Sri Ramakrishna

as revealed in the *Gospel* can be broadly classified into following types: 1. Samadhi in general: Sri Ramakrishna often used to get into different levels of samadhi, right in the presence of devotees around. 2. Revelations: Sri Ramakrishna, in a state of divine consciousness used to reveal about his divine communion, about divine manifestations and the mystery of certain incidents. 3. Revelations of the future trends and the future of various religious streams. 4. Revelation about himself and about his divinity and incarnation. 5. Various types of visions about the gods and goddesses. 6. Narration of the kundalini experiences. 7. Authentic insight about spiritual paths certain spiritual personalities. 8. Revelations about the nature of the devotees and the disciples much before their arrival and meeting them.

We will now go through and briefly reflect over the selected few important spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna as revealed by him in the *Gospel*.

### **Revelation about Sri Ramakrishna as an Incarnation of God**

Suddenly Sri Ramakrishna became serious, as if about to reveal a secret.

Master (to M.): "There is no outsider here. The other day, when Harish was with me, I saw Satchidananda come out of this sheath. It said, "I incarnate Myself in every age". I thought that I myself was saying these words out of mere fancy. I kept quiet and watched. Again Satchidananda Itself spoke, saying, "Chaitanya, too, worshipped Sakti".

**G**od and His splendour. God alone is real; the splendour has but a two-days existence. The magician and his magic. All become speechless with wonder at the magic, but it is all unreal. The magician alone is real. The rich man and his garden. People see only the garden; they should look for its rich owner.

—*Gospel*, 400.



The devotees listened to these words in amazement. Some wondered whether God Himself was seated before them in the form of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master paused a moment. Then he said, addressing M., 'I saw that it is the fullest manifestation of Satchidananda; but this time the Divine Power is manifested through the glory of sattva.'<sup>1</sup>

The devotees sat spellbound.

### **Visions about Sita, Rama, Ramalala, Radha-Krishna, and Gauranga**

Sometimes, when the mind descended to the Lila, I would meditate day and night on Sita and Rama. At those times I would constantly behold the forms of Sita and Rama. Ramalala [A metal image of the boy Rama given to Sri Ramakrishna during his sadhana period by a Vaishnava saint] was my constant companion. Sometimes I would bathe Him and sometimes feed Him.

Again, I used to be absorbed in the ideal of Radha and Krishna and would constantly see their forms. Or again, I would be absorbed in Gauranga. He is the harmonization of two ideals: the Purusha and the Prakriti. At such times I would always see the form of Gauranga (743).

### **Experience of Shatchakra**

During my sadhana period I had all kinds of amazing visions. I distinctly perceived the communion of Atman. A person exactly resembling me entered my body and began to commune with each one of the six lotuses. The petals of these lotuses had been closed; but as each of them experienced the communion, the drooping flower bloomed and turned itself upward. Thus blossomed forth the lotuses at the centres of Muladhara, Svadhisthana, Anahata, Visuddha, Ajna, and Sahasrara. The drooping flowers turned upward. I perceived all these things directly (744).

### **Experience of the Prophet of Islam**

How many other visions I saw! But I am not permitted to tell them. Someone is shutting my mouth, as it were. I used to find no distinction

between the sacred tulsi and the insignificant sajinā leaf. The feeling of distinction was entirely destroyed. Once I was meditating under the banyan when I was shown a Mussalman with a long beard. He came to me with rice in an earthen plate. He fed some other Mussalmans with the rice and also gave me a few grains to eat. The Mother showed me that there exists only One, and not two. It is Satchidananda alone that has taken all these various forms; He alone has become the world and its living beings. Again, it is He who has become food (746).

### **Sri Ramakrishna Proves to Narendra that His Spiritual Visions are True and not the Figment of Imagination of Hallucination**

At Jadu Mallick's garden house Narendra said to me, 'The forms of God that you see are the fiction of your mind.' I was amazed and said to him, 'But they speak too!' Narendra answered, 'Yes, one may think so.' I went to the temple and wept before the Mother. 'O Mother,' I said, 'what is this? Then is this all false? How could Narendra say that?' Instantly I had a revelation. I saw Consciousness—Indivisible Consciousness—and a divine being formed of that Consciousness. The divine form said to me, 'If your words are untrue, how is it that they tally with the facts?' Thereupon I said to Narendra: 'You rogue! You created unbelief in my mind. Don't come here any more' (772).

### **Experience of Shiva and Annapurna at Banaras, and Shiva giving Tarak Mantra to Liberate the Jivas**

Master: I went to Benares with Mathur Babu. Our boat was passing the Manikarnika Ghat on the Ganges, when suddenly I had a vision of Siva. I stood near the edge of the boat and went into samadhi. The boatman, fearing that I might fall into the water, cried to Hriday: 'Catch hold of him! Catch hold of him!' I saw Siva standing on that ghat, embodying in Himself all the seriousness of the world. At first I saw Him standing at a distance; then I saw Him

approaching me. At last He merged in me.

Another time, in an ecstatic mood, I saw that a sannyasi was leading me by the hand. We entered a temple and I had a vision of Annapurna made of gold (803).

### **About the Experience of Kundalini**

Just before my attaining this state of mind, it had been revealed to me how the Kundalini is aroused, how the lotuses of the different centres blossom forth, and how all this culminates in samadhi. This is a very secret experience. I saw a boy twenty-two or twenty-three years old, exactly resembling me, enter the Sushumna nerve and commune with the lotuses, touching them with his tongue. He began with the centre at the anus and passed through the centres at the sexual organ, navel, and so on. The different lotuses of those centres—four-petalled, six-petalled, ten-petalled, and so forth—had been drooping. At his touch they stood erect (830).

### **Vision of Sri Chaitanya's Team with Balaram Basu in it**

God reveals the nature of the devotees to me before they arrive. I saw Chaitanya's party singing and dancing near the Panchavati, between the banyan-tree and the bakul-tree. I noticed Balaram there. If it weren't for him, who would there be to supply me with sugar candy and such things? (Pointing to M.) And I saw him too (831).

### **About the Divinity of Narendra and Kedar**

I have had many amazing visions. I had a vision of the Indivisible Satchidananda. Inside It I saw two groups with a fence between them. On one side were Kedar, Chuni, and other devotees who believe in the Personal God. On the other side was a luminous space like a heap of red brick-dust. Inside it was seated Narendra immersed in samadhi. Seeing him absorbed in meditation, I called aloud, 'Oh, Narendra!' He opened his eyes a little. I came to realize that



*The Ramlala Statue Worshipped by Sri Ramakrishna*

he had been born, in another form, in Simla in a kayastha family. At once I said to the Divine Mother, 'Mother, entangle him in maya; otherwise he will give up his body in samadhi.' Kedar, a believer in the Personal God, peeped in and ran away with a shudder (ibid.).

### **The Divine Mother Herself Lives in Sri Ramakrishna's Body**

Therefore I feel that it is the Divine Mother Herself who dwells in this body and plays with the devotees. When I first had my exalted state of mind, my body would radiate light. My chest was always flushed. Then I said to the Divine Mother: 'Mother, do not reveal Thyself outwardly. Please go inside.' That is why my complexion is so dull now (ibid.).

### **Totapuri Wonders How Quickly Sri Ramakrishna Attains Nirvikalpa Samadhi**

Nangta instructed me in Vedanta. In three days I went into samadhi. At the sight of my samadhi under the madhavi vine, he was quite taken aback and exclaimed, 'Ah! What is this?' Then he came to know who resides in this body. He said to me, 'Please let me go.' At these words of Totapuri, I went into an ecstatic mood and said, 'You cannot go till I realize the Truth of Vedanta' (832).

### **Vision about the Future Devotees**

He who dwells in me tells me beforehand what particular class of devotees will come to me. When I have a vision of Gauranga, I know that devotees of Gauranga are coming. When I have a vision of Kali, the Saktas come.

At the time of the evening service I used to cry out from the roof of the kuthi, weeping: 'Oh, where are you all? Come to me!' You see, they are all gathering here, one by one.

God Himself dwells in this body. It is He who, of His own accord, is working with these devotees (ibid.).

### **Continuous Vision of the Absolute**

Master (to M.): You see, nowadays it is not necessary for me to meditate much. All at once I become aware of the Indivisible Brahman. Nowadays the vision of the Absolute is continuous with me (918).

### **Revelation: Sri Ramakrishna as One of the Forms of God**

Turning to Girish, he said: 'I am seeing many forms of God. Among them I find this one also [meaning his own form]' (941).

### **Some Thoughts on Sri Ramakrishna's Spiritual Experiences**

Let us now attempt to examine and reflect, in general, on all the above mentioned spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to explain each of these mystical experiences with reference to scriptures and in the framework of psychology of religious experiences and mysticism.

The wide range of visions, different states of samadhis, kundalini experiences, and so on, revealed by Sri Ramakrishna as recorded in the *Gospel* definitely indicate what a colossal spiritual personality he was, an incarnation of God unheard of in the annals of the history of religion. He demonstrated various deeper truths about God and spiritual states mentioned in the

scriptures, like Bhagavadgita, Vedanta, yoga, tantra, *Adhyatma Ramayana*, and Bhagavata.

Sri Ramakrishna was like a spiritual scientist who was not content with mere faith, beliefs, and external practices of religion. He wanted to experiment, practice, and find out the truth of every aspect of God and religion in the crucible of his life experience. The gamut of authentic spiritual experiences gained by him in his spiritual laboratory enabled him to demonstrate that God can be realised and he is more real than the apparent transitory world.

He did not confine his exploration of spiritual truth only through Hindu religion, but he wanted to experience the common spiritual bases of the truth of all religions.

For the vast majority of us, the objective sense bound world is only real and God is real by the virtue of faith, and not by experience. But Sri Ramakrishna's life, which is a lighthouse, *apta-vachana*, authoritative word of spiritual experiences, demonstrates and illumines the truth of God in innumerable ways. When we try to understand and absorb this phenomenon, it dawns on us that there is a higher, subtler, deeper, inner existence beyond the apparent objective concrete world, which we can also experience if we can create required conditions by having a sincere aspiration for God and the practice of spiritual disciplines. This practice leads to the purification of our mind and life and equips us to awaken our mind and thus experience spiritual consciousness hidden within us.

Sri Aurobindo points out in the introduction to his book *Synthesis of Yoga*:

In a recent unique example, in the life of Ramakrishna Paramhansa, we see a colossal spiritual capacity first driving straight to the divine realisation, taking, as it were, the kingdom of heaven by violence, and then seizing upon one Yogic method after another and extracting the substance out of it with an incredible rapidity,



always to return to the heart of the whole matter, the realisation and possession of God by the power of love, by the extension of inborn spirituality into various experience and by the spontaneous play of an intuitive knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

The impact of reading *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* on the minds of readers is so profound that it infuses faith in the existence of God and awakens their spiritual consciousness. The revelations of the direct spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna in his own words makes God, the unknown, into God, the knowable and then into God, the known, and the subject of experience. It purifies and fills the mind with the power of faith and awakens our mind to the reality of God. It generates in us *shrad-dha*, which means God becomes somewhat real to us much before the actual experience, and thus goads our emotions, will, and the intellect to aspire for the vision of God, as we see in the actual life of Sri Ramakrishna. That is why Mahatma Gandhi says: 'His life enables us to see God face to face.'<sup>3</sup>

The history of religions is replete with religious and spiritual ideas, mythological stories, rituals, and methods of worship of God, but seldom do we find authentic record and the clear narration of different types of spiritual experiences called samadhi, a state of exalted spiritual experience, visions of divine forms explained by the experiencer himself which is recorded as a fact of history and passed on to the posterity. This we find in *the Gospel*. In the history of the world religions, perhaps we do not find any other spiritual master doing so many types of spiritual practices and experiments, and gaining such varieties of spiritual experiences which are so perfectly recorded by his disciple in the manner we see in the *Gospel*. The word of God never before was put in such a discernible simple language so as to make the common man understand the truth of God and intricate experiences of spiritual life.



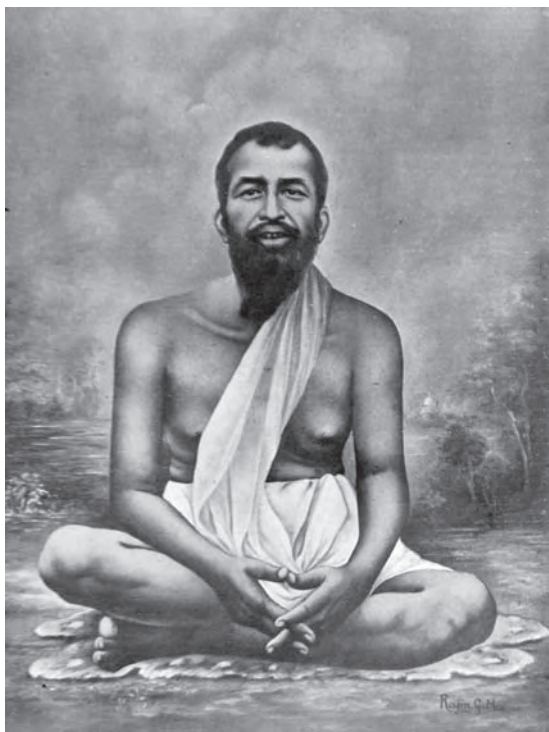
*Sri Ramakrishna's Vision of Mother Sita*

The words of Sri Ramakrishna also rekindle faith in God in the faithless and nullify all the atheistic tendencies of the mind who reads the *Gospel*.

Sri Ramakrishna is the epitome of the religious experiences of humankind. The wide range of spiritual experiences that we come across in the *Gospel* indicates that his was the great superconscious life and it can dissolve our ignorance and transform our consciousness and lead us Godward. He is the testimony to the divine power that sustains the universe and his *Gospel*, a bridge to the divine realm. PB

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# Sri Ramakrishnarin Amuda Mozhigal— Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita *in Tamil*

**Swami Asutoshananda**

of meeting Sri Ramakrishna and receiving his blessings. Madhavan Pillai and his family remained devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Madhavan Pillai passed away uttering the holy name of Sri Ramakrishna. Swamis Ambananda, a disciple of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Ojasananda, two venerated monks of the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Ottapalam, Kerala, were from Madhavan Pillai's family.<sup>1</sup>

Presumably, Sri Ramakrishna's ideas and teachings started spreading in Tamil Nadu from then onwards. His photos were available even before Swamiji came to Tamil Nadu as a wandering monk in the beginning of 1893. There is an interesting incident about that:

Dr Nanjunda Rao, a would-be disciple of Swami Vivekananda, invited the swami to dine at his home. When Swamiji arrived there, he was led to the room where holy pictures were hung. Swamiji walked about looking at them. Suddenly he stopped transfixed before a picture and others could see tears welling up in his eyes. When asked for the reason, Swamiji replied with deep emotion and choked voice: 'It is my Guru, Sri Ramakrishna!'<sup>2</sup>

The picture came to Nanjunda Rao much earlier when once he had visited the Theosophical Society, Adyar, to see a friend and had found

## ***Sri Ramakrishna's 'Visit' to Tamil Nadu***

**W**HEN DID the people of Tamil Nadu come to know of Sri Ramakrishna? Unbelievable is the answer—it was during his lifetime itself! All the way from down south, from Kanyakumari district in Tamil Nadu, then a part of Travancore, Kerala, the last tip of India, a Madhavan Pillai visited him in Dakshineswar!

Madhavan Pillai was a clerk in the office of a British political agent in Thiruvananthapuram. Calcutta was the then capital of India. As a part of his official duty he had to visit Calcutta. It was there he happened to hear about the Dakshineswar temple and an 'austere yogi' living there. Thus he had the unique opportunity

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Swami Asutoshananda is a monk of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.

a newly arrived American member clearing out some drawers. On one side lay a pile of things to be burned away. Among them was a picture of a *sadhu*. Dr Nanjunda Rao stooped and picked it up, saying, 'This is a holy man. You should not throw his picture on the floor.' 'Oh! No one knows who he is,' the American replied, 'and we must get rid of some of this clutter.' 'Let me take the picture then,' the doctor said. He carried it home, had it framed and hung it up with his other pictures of holy men (190).

Probably after Swamiji's visit in 1893 the idea about Sri Ramakrishna and his teachings started spreading in Tamil Nadu. In November 1893 we see G Subramania Iyer reproduced an article *Paramahansa Srimat Ramakrishna*, by Protap Chunder Mazoomdar in *The Hindu*.<sup>3</sup>

At the behest of Swamiji, Swami Ramakrishnananda came to Madras in March 1897 and established the first official branch of Ramakrishna Math, Belur, in the Ice House—Now Vivekananda House; in Tamil, Vivekanandar Illam,—Triplicane. Through his efforts, especially through his talks, the people of Tamil Nadu came to know of Sri Ramakrishna at large.

### ***Sri Ramakrishna's Teachings in Tamil***

Swami Ramakrishnananda had a great influence over V O Chidambaram Pillai, a great Indian Nationalist of Tamil Nadu.<sup>4</sup> That could be the reason why we find one of the earliest writing about Sri Ramakrishna in Tamil was by Chidambaram Pillai. He wrote in the Tamil monthly *Viveka Bhanu* in 1904. Subsequently other writings started appearing in other journals.

From 1920 onwards Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, started publishing the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in Tamil. Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna, a collection of Sri Ramakrishna's 1,121 teachings, was translated by Thathachariyar and published as *Sri Ramakrishnarin Upadesa*

*Mozhigal* in 1920. It underwent several reprints and continues to be on sale. Second major publication was *Sri Ramakrishnarin Mozhiyamudam* in 1950s. This was an abridged translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and was done by Swami Paramatmananda.

### ***Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita in Tamil***

It was Swami Tapasyananada, who became the president of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, in 1971, who contemplated upon bringing out the direct translation of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in Tamil. He entrusted the task to Swami Tanmayananda, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and the then Manager of Chennai Math, who knew Bengali and Tamil well. Thus was published the first volume of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamritam*, a direct translation of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, the Bengali original, in 1976. This was subsequently withdrawn, when by the time, the full translation was made available in three volumes as *Sri Ramakrishnarin Amuda Mozhigal*, in 1982, which is now on sale undergoing a revised edition and several reprints.

In order that this modern Scripture reach even economically weaker section, the first edition was sold at a throw away subsidised price—Rs 50 for a set of three volumes.

### ***Hurdles especially in the Tamil Translation***

Swami Nikhilananda, the translator of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* into English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, points out in his Preface: 'No translation can do full justice to the original. This difficulty is all the more felt in the

**S**o there can be no fear if the guru's grace descends on one. He will let you know who you are and what your real nature is.

—*Gospel*, 233.





Dr Nanjunda Rao

present work, whose contents are of a deep mystical nature and describe the inner experiences of a great seer.’<sup>5</sup>

While this is true of the translation of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* into other Indian languages, Tamil translation had to face an additional hurdle. All Indian languages except Tamil are Sanskrit-based and the Sanskrit and Bengali terms like *samadhi* and *bhava* can be more or less directly used in the translations. In Tamil, it is possible to trace some influence of Sanskrit, but Tamil is certainly not Sanskrit-based. Therefore, it is almost impossible to use Sanskrit words. And, there are almost no equivalent words in Tamil available for these Sanskrit or Bengali words. Now, if the words

are explained every time, the flow of reading is hampered. If we have to reach ordinary Tamil readers, a way should be worked out. Swami Tanmayananda effectively used the Sanskrit or Bengali terms as such in the text providing a glossary at the end of the book explaining the terms.

Also, it is not easy to translate the colloquial Bengali of Sri Ramakrishna marked with local customs and traditions of Bengal. However, Swami Tanmayananda has done a unique task of putting them in an easy Tamil and produced this *Sri Ramakrishnarin Amuda Mozhigal*, the masterly three-volume Scripture in Tamil.

Also, in those days the chronologically arranged *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* was yet to be published. But Swami Tanmayananda himself prepared a chronological Bengali volume manually and used it for his translation work.

### **Present Special Edition and its Special Features**

Sometimes it is told that people of modern busy world prefer to read small handy volumes instead of larger ones. But it is almost contrary with the case of *Sri Ramakrishnarin Amuda Mozhigal*, a three-volume book of more than 2,000 pages. People showed interest in having the full volumes rather than going for abridged versions or selections. So, it was felt that some additional notes and glossaries would enhance the reading. This work was entrusted to Swami Asutoshananda, who had previously assisted Swami Tanmayananda in his translation works and has also several Tamil works to his credit. It was then the dedication ceremony of the Universal Temple of Sri Ramakrishna, a historic event in Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, was fast approaching in February 2000. It was decided that the new edition would be released during that function.

The following are the special features of this edition:

1. *Valmiki Ramayana* (1:3,4), the First Epic written by the First Poet, narrates how the author had written this epic: 'Of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, also of King Dasharatha and his wives, and what bechanced on Rama when he was in kingdom Ayodhya; Valmiki veritably discerned all that. Their smiles, their conversations, their deeds and the succession of events as well, all of them the sage saw wholly and clearly by the yogic power conferred by Brahma.' Valmiki saw the whole Ramayana in front of his yogic eyes and wrote the Ramayana. A similar event is narrated by M., the recorder of *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* too. M. says:

On every scene I have meditated a thousand times throughout my life. Therefore, the story of Thakur's (Sri Ramakrishna's) Lila (divine play) which took place forty years ago was again enacted before my eyes by Thakur's grace, as if I had just been witnessing it, the distance of time having been annihilated. In this sense, it can be said that the story of Thakur was recorded in the living presence of Thakur Himself. Many a time I did not feel satisfied with my description of the events; I would then immediately plunge myself in deep meditation on Thakur. Then the correct image would arise before my mind's eye in a bright, real and living form. That is why in spite of the big gap in time in the physical sense, this story remains so fresh and life-like in my mind as if it happened just now.<sup>6</sup>

This mystical background of this modern scripture is brought out in an article in the beginning of this special edition.

2. A brief account of Sri Ramakrishna's life is given with a special reference to the important places and persons referred to in the text.


3. Glossary for technical words.

4. Short notes on various religious movements referred to in the text.

5. Short life-sketches of persons referred to.

6. Three indices—one for songs, one for tales and similes, and a regular index.

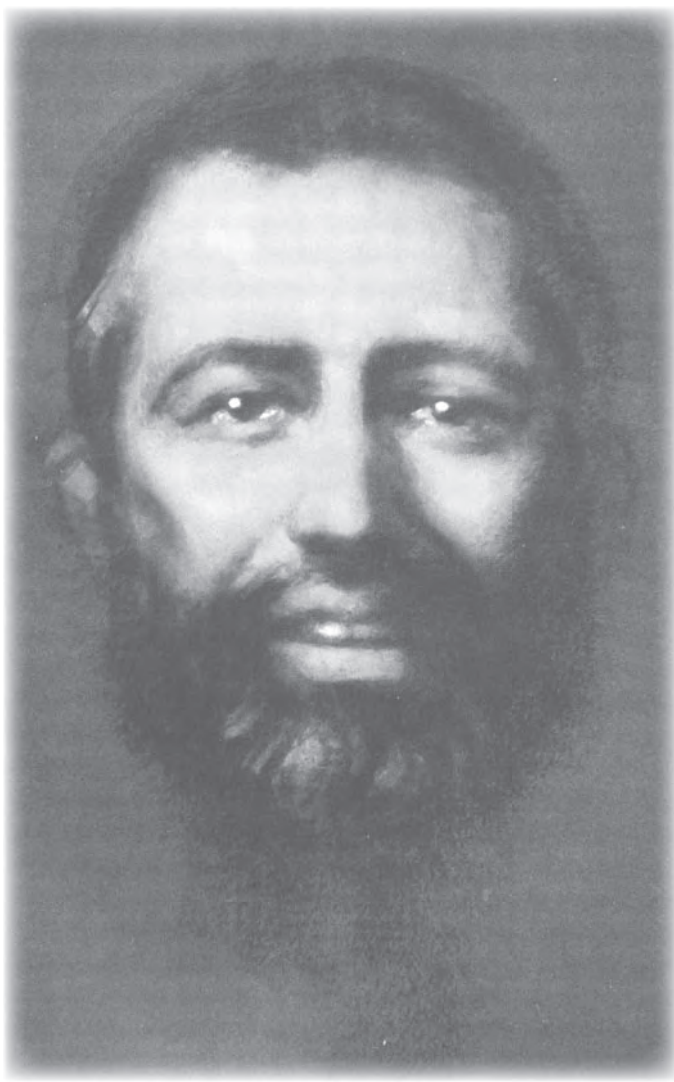
## Glory of Amuda Mozhigal

Another feature worth mentioning is the brief introduction where eight glories of *Kathamrita* are given. These enable the new reader to relate oneself to take to the reading of Amuda Mozhigal daily. And, we have several instances of people narrating how they have been in to the habit of reading 'Amuda Mozhigal' daily as a spiritual practice and how it soothes and comforts them and remain a source of spiritual power in their life. 

## Notes and References

1. A note on Madhavan Pillai was published in 'Bhagyavanaya Oru Malayali', *Prabuddha Keralam* 72/8 (August 1987), 317. *Prabuddha Keralam* is the Malayalam journal of the Ramakrishna Order.
2. Sister Devamata, *Days in an Indian Monastery* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2003), 191;
3. Originally published in the *Theistic Quarterly Review*, October, 1879.
4. He is popularly known by his initials, V O C, spelt Vaa. Oo. Ce in Tamil, also known as *Kappalottiya Tamilan*—'The Tamil Helmsman', was a Tamil political leader. It was Swami Ramakrishnananda, who advised him to 'do something for the nation'. V O C mentions this in his autobiography.
5. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2009), vii.
6. Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Centenary Memorial (Chandigarh: Sri Ma Trust, 1982), 144.

Spiritual discipline is necessary in order to see God. I had to pass through very severe discipline. How many austerities I practised under the bel-tree! I would lie down under it, crying to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, reveal Thyself to me.' The tears would flow in torrents and soak my body. —*Gospel*, 238.



## The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna *through the Eyes of a Western Monk*

Swami Atmajnanananda

A FEW MONTHS AGO I received a request from the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* to write an article on the 'Influence of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in the United

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States.' I responded that I found the topic quite interesting, but really did know how to approach such a topic. It seemed to require the kind of research I am not very good at, or at best a kind of speculation based on a small sample of Western devotees whom I know. Then it occurred to me that the one thing I know very well is how



reading the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* has affected my spiritual life. When I suggested the new topic to the *Prabuddha Bharata* editor, he graciously agreed. My own personal reflections on this beautiful topic may give some insight into the way other Westerners have benefitted from reading the *Gospel*, despite the fact that my case is a little unusual in a few respects, the most obvious being that I had the great blessing of visiting Dakshineswar, sitting in Sri Ramakrishna's room, and drinking in the holy atmosphere of the Kali Temple compound before ever hearing the name of the *Gospel*. In any event, this short essay will provide me with an opportunity to express my great love and gratitude for a book which I feel has changed my life in a way no other book has.

### **The Setting of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna**

Three elements are inextricably bound together in my mind's eye: Sri Ramakrishna, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, and the Dakshineswar Temple Garden. I say this despite the fact that many of the incidents recorded in the *Gospel* took place elsewhere, some in the homes of great householder devotees such as Balaram Basu, some on visits to the theatre, the *maidan*, and so on, and some after Sri Ramakrishna left Dakshineswar for Shyampukur and Cossipore. Still, perhaps because of M.'s initial reaction to meeting Sri Ramakrishna at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, as well as my own early visits there, the identification of the three is very deeply etched in my heart. So, when I think of Sri Ramakrishna, it is invariably as I picture him seated on his small cot in his room, conversing with the devotees.

I should mention that my first visit to Dakshineswar in October of 1972 did not come without the benefit of any connection with the Ramakrishna tradition. I had earlier purchased a copy of the *Bhagavad Gita*, translated by Swami

Vivekananda's disciple, Swami Swarupananda. While travelling in South India some time later, I stumbled across a copy of *The Teachings of Swami Vivekananda*, a small but wonderful book containing excerpts from some of Swamiji's most inspiring lectures and writings. Though I had studied Western Philosophy in college, I found the ideas contained in that small book to reach such soaring heights of spirituality that I was practically beside myself in wonder. I immediately felt a deep connection to Swamiji as well as to the Vedantic tradition he expounded on. It seemed as if I had met the man who spoke directly to my heart as well as to my intellect.

It was in the introduction to *The Teachings of Swami Vivekananda* that I first read about the life of Swamiji and the influence of Sri Ramakrishna on him. The short biographical sketch included the first meeting of the young Narendra with Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, his service to him at Cossipore, as well as his great success in the Parliament of Religions. After reading about the Dakshineswar phase of his life, I developed a great desire to go to Calcutta and visit the Kali Temple compound myself. So, I went to Calcutta, where I happened to meet a family of devotees living there and eventually made my way to Dakshineswar. Now, the reason I am spending so much time describing my first visit to the Kali Temple and Sri Ramakrishna's room, is that my initial experience played such a significant role in my appreciation of the *Gospel*

**K**nowledge and love—both are paths leading to God. Those who follow the path of love have to observe a little more outer purity. But the violation of this by a man following the path of knowledge cannot injure him. It is destroyed in the fire of knowledge. Even a banana tree is burnt up when it is thrown into a roaring fire.

—*Gospel*, 238.

when I finally read it for the first time perhaps a year later.

On that momentous day, I left with one of the family members for Belur Math. It was early evening, so by the time we took the ferry from the Math to Dakshineswar, the sun was setting and we arrived just as *arati* was about to take place and could hear the blowing of the conches and the ringing of the bells. The reader can imagine the joy I felt when I read about M.'s first visit to Dakshineswar at precisely the same time of day, listening to the same sacred sounds of worship. I cannot, of course, compare my reaction with M.'s, when he first went to Dakshineswar and felt as if he had entered the abode of Sukadeva, who was expounding the words of the *Bhagavata* to the surrounding sages. But I can say that I also felt the overwhelming holiness of Sri Ramakrishna's room and his undeniable presence there, even so many years after his passing.

Before leaving India on that very first visit, I purchased copies of the *Four Yogas* of Swami Vivekananda. I still had not heard the name of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, or if I had, it did not register in my mind. At that time, Swamiji was my main source of inspiration. I was, in short, a 'Swamiji man!' I devoured the *Four Yogas*, and began a genuine and sincere study of Vedanta, including the *Upanisads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, and some works of Acharya Shankara.

### **First Reading of the Gospel**

I cannot say with any certainty when and how I first came to read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. This is interesting to me because I remember so clearly my first reading of the words of Swamiji, and also because the reading of the *Gospel* would soon become the mainstay of my spiritual life and my best holy company. But I do know when I first began a *serious* study of the *Gospel*. I had recently returned from my second visit to India

and had enrolled in a post-graduate program at the University of Pennsylvania in South Asian Studies. My main interest was in learning enough Sanskrit to be able to read the Vedantic literature in the original, and also enough Bengali to be able to read the *Gospel* and other books of the Order. So, while I had not yet fallen in love with the *Gospel*, I certainly had a profound respect for it. I also understood that, no matter how accurate a translation is, nothing can compare to reading a text in its original language.

At that time I had only the short, abridged version of the *Gospel*. Unlike my experience with Swami Vivekananda, I was not instantly overwhelmed on my first reading of the text. I remember a certain amount of confusion regarding M.—always referred to in the third person,—and references to him 'thinking' certain thoughts to himself. Once, however, I figured out the literary technique of the *Gospel* and M.'s habit of remaining hidden throughout, my interest grew tremendously. I spent hours reading the *Gospel* every night, starting over as soon as I had finished it. It soon became clear to me that I would have to purchase the unabridged version since I was going through the abridged one at such a rapid pace. So I purchased that and began an even fuller study of the *Gospel*. Since I was then trying to learn Bengali, with the express purpose of reading M.'s original *Kathamrita*, I purchased the early five-volume set and began to read the English and Bengali versions side by side.

One of the first of the many Bengali statements of Sri Ramakrishna that caught my eye at that time was: *sandhya-belay sab kaj chere ĩśvarer smaran karbe* ('Set aside all work after sunset and think of the Lord.') So I made it a practice to finish my course work during the day and spend my nights in meditation and reading the *Gospel*, now both in Bengali and English.

For most of the several years I was at the university, I was alone and tried to practice solitude as far as possible, according to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. So quite literally, my hour or so each night of reading was my best and only holy company. I would become transfixed at the brilliance of the mind of Sri Ramakrishna and his ability to explain the most subtle truths in the simplest language with the help of easily understood examples from his village life. I was charmed by the seemingly endless variety of spiritual moods and experiences he underwent on a daily basis.

But as much as I appreciated the ideas presented in the *Gospel*, I found an additional benefit, perhaps greater than any other, and that goes back to my initial description of my first visit to Dakshineswar. And it is here where I think my experience is quite different from the usual experience of other Western devotees or monks. Typically devotees from Western countries will somehow discover Sri Ramakrishna and Vedanta through one of our centers in the West or by stumbling across a book of the Order. After many years of deepening their devotion to the movement, they may perhaps decide to make a pilgrimage to India and the holy places associated with the Order, including, of course, Dakshineswar, Belur Math, Kamarpukur, and Jayrambati. When they finally step into Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar, they will be able to understand, 'Ah, this is what his room really looked like. This is where Thakur worshipped Holy Mother as *Shodashi* on the night of *Phala-harini* Puja. This is the veranda where Sri Ramakrishna first addressed Narendra as a great sage and threw him into the state of Samadhi.'



Sri Ramakrishna Performing Shodashi Puja

But for me, everything was reversed. The moment I read of Sri Ramakrishna sitting on his small cot, facing north, I could visualise it in my mind's eye exactly as it was. I could picture where each of the direct disciples was sitting through the detailed descriptions of M. I could see the view from the Panchavati when the young boys had their picnics there under the watchful eye of Sri Ramakrishna. Even that first short visit to his room so many years earlier left an indelible impression on me that is impossible to forget. In addition, I did not have to struggle with the many cultural and social elements of Hinduism which often lead to confusion for Westerners since I had already had two extensive visits to India and felt quite at home there.

**Y**ou must practise spiritual discipline a little. It will not do simply to say that milk contains butter. You must let the milk set into curd and then churn it. Only then can you get butter from it. Spiritual aspirants must go into solitude now and then. After acquiring love of God in solitude, they may live in the world. —*Gospel*, 241.





South-Eastern Side of Sri Ramakrishna's Room in Dakshineswar

So I found that my reading of the *Gospel* was also a way of transporting myself back through time and space, from my small flat in Philadelphia in 1975 to the Dakshineswar Kali Temple compound of 1882–5. And I noticed a very interesting phenomenon, which I was later to learn was one of the important teachings of M. himself, namely that when I sat for meditation, I would forget my surroundings completely and feel that I was sitting with Sri Ramakrishna in his room. Or, perhaps more correctly, I would feel that my own small flat had transformed itself into his room at Dakshineswar. The reading of the *Gospel* had led me, unknowingly, to the practice of *Lila Dhyana*, meditation on the divine play of Sri Ramakrishna.

One of the first questions M. would ask of

new devotees who came to him for a visit was, 'Have you visited the Dakshineswar Kali Temple and Sri Ramakrishna's room?' If they had not visited, he would encourage them, but with some specific instructions. He would remind them not to go like ordinary tourists but to remember the events that took place in each corner of the room they visited and each spot of ground in the compound: Sri Ramakrishna's Tantric Sadhana under the Bel tree; his visions and experiences near the Panchavati, and so on. He encouraged them to etch deeply in their minds the picture of each place so that when they sat for meditation, they could bring each scene before the eye of the mind and re-enact the divine play of Sri Ramakrishna. Unknowingly, I had tried to follow M.'s instructions through both my reading of the *Gospel* and my numerous visits to Dakshineswar.

### **Translation of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna**

I want to say a few words about the English translation of the *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, because Western readers of the *Gospel* often wonder about the accuracy and authenticity of the translation. Since I read the original Bengali version alongside of Swami Nikhilananda's English translation, I was able to judge for myself, as far as I was able to at the time, the accuracy of the translation. This was an important issue for me, since I basically studied the Bengali language with the sole purpose of reading the words of Sri Ramakrishna as they were uttered by his own lips. In my early days, as I was struggling to learn the new language, I would try to translate the words of the *Kathamrita* myself before looking at Swami Nikhilananda's translation. And I found, to my delight, that he had somehow managed to capture the meaning and mood of Sri Ramakrishna's words in a far better way than I was ever able to. So, I feel confident in telling

others that they are really not missing anything of great value by reading the English version of the *Kathamrita*. Of course, it is impossible to capture the sweetness of Sri Ramakrishna's own speech or the grandeur of M.'s descriptive passages in English, but that is more a question of language than translation.

If there is any issue regarding translation that is the least bit controversial, it is without question the phrase 'woman and gold' as a translation of Sri Ramakrishna's oft-repeated expression *kaminī kancana*. I personally did not find it offensive in the context in which it was spoken, and the detailed footnote explaining its real meaning was also quite helpful. But I certainly can see how, especially considering modern sensitivity to gender issues and gender equality, it sounds quite jarring to the ear of many Western readers, especially women. That said, I really do not see any simple solution to the problem. 'Lust and greed' is certainly more palatable, but less literal, so that translation is also open to criticism. It is interesting to note that even Swamiji preferred the phrase *kama kancana*, 'lust and gold,' understanding that that was the real significance anyhow and avoided making women feel that they were being looked down upon in any way.

### Teachings from The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

So far, I have concentrated more on the atmosphere created by the *Gospel*, the sacred aura provided by living in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna through the writing of M., and the power of the text to transport one through time and space. But what struck me with equal force were some of the beautiful teachings of Sri Ramakrishna which, as he himself hinted at in several places, 'go beyond the experiences recorded in the Vedas and Vedānta'.<sup>1</sup> And the fact that these teachings were reinforced with reminiscences

of his own experiences confirming the truth of them makes them even more appealing.

Two things that immediately impressed me were the liberality of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings and the sophistication of his understanding. He did not exclude anyone, either personally or philosophically. One of his dearest companions, whom he quotes often with regard to different spiritual truths, was Vaishnavcharan, spiritual leader of a modern sect that even Sri Ramakrishna's closest disciples looked down upon. When any criticism of such devotees would be raised, Sri Ramakrishna would very sweetly remind them that one can enter a house even through the back door where the sweeper comes to clean the latrine. His doctrine of *yata mat tata path*, 'as many faiths, so many paths' (514, 559, 748) not only included the various Hindu sects, but also other religions, notably Christianity and Islam. But equally, it harmonised the different philosophical schools of Dualism, Qualified Non-dualism, and Non-dualism. This was one of Sri Ramakrishna's most deeply held beliefs, and he often spoke of it by quoting the reply of Hanuman to Rama (822). For Sri Ramakrishna, it was never a question of absolute truth, but rather of point of view. When there is body consciousness, we may think of ourselves in the context of the master-servant relationship; when we feel we are individual souls, we take the attitude of being part of God; and when identifying with the higher Self, we see no difference between ourselves and

There are two kinds of yoga: hathayoga and rajayoga. The hathayogi practises physical exercises. His goal is to acquire supernatural powers: longevity and the eight psychic powers. These are his aims. But the aim of rajayoga is the attainment of devotion, ecstatic love, knowledge, and renunciation. Of these two, rajayoga is the better.

—*Gospel*, 244–5.



PB January 2018





# ***The Contemporary Relevance of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna***

**Pravrajika Brahmaprana**

**I** WAS A COLLEGE STUDENT in Los Angeles, California when first introduced to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in 1970. This was during the ‘Great Church Exodus,’ a tumultuous time in America when two-thirds of the country’s Christians and Jews had left their church or synagogue, disillusioned with church authority and the ‘business of religion.’ It was also at the time of the anti-Vietnam war movement—the first time in the United States’ history when a war was brought to an end by civil protest. It was at the time of the Watergate scandal, when government corruption was exposed and prominent officials deposed from office. It was at a time when comparative religions courses first entered

the nation’s college and university curricula. And it was at a time when the West turned to the East.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Los Angeles, like other eastern and western American seaboard metropolises, was a magnet for the influx of authentic Eastern religious teachers, who went on to ignite a spiritual movement that soon entered mainstream American lifestyles, conversations, and religious thought. ‘Guru,’ ‘karma,’ ‘dharma,’ ‘mantra,’ ‘yoga’ quickly appeared in Merriam Webster’s dictionary. It was at that time that my college class on world religions was reading Huston Smith’s text *The Religions of Man*, within which the chapter on Hinduism ended with sayings of Sri Ramakrishna, which Smith deemed the ‘finest voice’ on the essential unity of the world’s religions.<sup>1</sup>

One day my professor announced: ‘We’re

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going to the Vedanta temple in Hollywood to meet the spiritual grandson of Ramakrishna.’ ‘Who could that be?’ we wondered. When my class entered the Hollywood temple, Swami Prabhavananda, disciple of Swami Brahmananda, was sitting on the shrine dais, giving a Bhagavadgita class. I don’t remember what he said, but for the first time in my life I knew I had seen a man of God—that religion was true. In that brief moment my life changed forever.

Shortly thereafter I was introduced to Vivekananda’s four yogas, which I devoured within a month’s time. And suddenly monastic life loomed before me as the only goal in life.

Next came *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.

Before I officially joined the Santa Barbara convent in 1973, I used to spend several nights at the convent whenever Swami Prabhavananda, the spiritual leader of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, would come for bi-monthly or monthly visits to lecture at the Vedanta temple. To me that time was heaven on earth. In the evenings after *arati*, the nuns would gather in the convent living room. They would bring their knitting, sewing, crocheting, or cotton to fashion *arati* wicks, and a senior nun would read from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* as Swami Prabhavananda and convent members listened. As Ramakrishna’s teachings or parables were read aloud, various passages would spark Swami’s memory and he would reminisce about the direct disciples of Ramakrishna he had met or an unpublished firsthand account of an incident in the lives of Ramakrishna or Sarada Devi. At those times, such an intimate and profound atmosphere was created that I would feel as though I were living within the orbit of an

incarnation of God—a rare blessing on earth. It was such an unusual feeling that it took me several months to assimilate that awareness.

Swami Prabhavananda instructed the nuns to gather after *arati* every evening to read the *Gospel* aloud, even when he was not present in Santa Barbara, as ‘it creates a spiritual atmosphere,’ he would explain. And so that instruction became a tradition that was upheld in the convent even after Swami Prabhavananda’s passing. As a brand new devotee, I was so inspired by these *Gospel* readings, that I purchased Swami Nikhilananda’s unabridged *Gospel* in order that I could read it on my own. But soon I became baffled and a bit overwhelmed by Ramakrishna’s village humor and antics. They seemed strange to me—completely outside my sphere of Western culture. When I expressed these doubts to the nuns, they laughed and explained that such a reaction was completely natural for a young modern Westerner. Their light-hearted response somehow relaxed my doubts, and so I was able to slowly return to the *Gospel* and ease my way through it—with the help of their answers to my many questions.

However, it was only years later in 1979, during my first pilgrimage to India as a young *brahmacharini*, that I was finally able to place Ramakrishna’s behavior in the cultural context of his simple village life of Kamarpukur. Wandering through the village lanes, meeting the villagers and descendants of Ramakrishna’s family, and observing their simple lifestyle and interactions, I was overwhelmed by the breath-taking simplicity of it all. It was such an overwhelming and all-consuming experience that I suffered a six-months’ cultural shock after returning to America—a culture which now seemed so complex to me and estranged from the natural rhythms of life. But when, in the evenings after *arati*, I would gather with the other nuns to hear

It is not lust alone that one should be afraid of in the life of the world. There is also anger. Anger arises when obstacles are placed in the way of desire.—*Gospel*, 247.

the *Gospel* read aloud or retire to my room to read it privately, all the precious sights, sounds, and memories of Kamarpukur's simple village life would flood the mind and wash over me like healing waters. Sri Ramakrishna's simplicity—his lifestyle, teachings, and behavior—was no longer baffling; it had become integrated as a profound and moving part of my spiritual life. Even today the *Gospel* scenes, conversations, and teachings continue to take me back almost forty years to my first face-to-face encounter with that breathtaking simplicity.

Undoubtedly, other Westerners who read the *Gospel* also become realigned to a spirituality that exudes and inspires simplicity—a necessary component of spiritual life. As Swami Brahmananda instructed a devotee in *The Eternal Companion*: 'Go to Him with the simplicity

of a child, and He will receive you. Be simple and guileless. Without simplicity and childlike faith nobody can realize Him.'<sup>2</sup>

What then, in the twenty-first century, continues to draw contemporary Western minds to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*?

I once asked Swami Shraddhananda, disciple of Swami Shivananda: 'Do some scriptures have a greater manifestation of consciousness than others?' 'Yes,' the swami replied. 'There is greater consciousness in certain scriptures such as the ten major Upanishads, the Bhagavad-gita, and *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*.' That consciousness is palpable for some devotees; it lifts off the *Gospel's* pages, as it were. We seem to breathe it in as we read from it, and it inhabits our memories of the Master, sinks into our subconscious, and awakens our insight. Once

*Kamarpukur Village*





Pravrajika Prabhaprana, a senior nun who passed away in 1997 at the Santa Barbara convent, asked Swami Prabhavananda, 'We have been reading the Gospel for years, yet every time something new strikes us. Why is that?' 'As you progress, your insight awakens,' the swami explained. The *Gospel* is there to awaken our insight.

In fact, some devotees who maintain a daily practice of reading the *Gospel* at night before their bedtime, divulge that the answer to whatever question they may harbour during the day—whether secular or spiritual—is found in the pages of the *Gospel* at night. To them, the *Gospel* is a constant companion and a living teacher.

When Wick, the CEO of a cosmopolitan American magazine, a Roman Catholic, and an ardent devotee of Ramakrishna, was asked, 'What is the contemporary relevance of the *Gospel*?' he replied, 'The avatar draws us.' In seven years' time, Wick has been drawn to read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* seven times. The attraction was irresistible.

Undoubtedly that drawing power of the avatar is also enhanced to its fullest by the credentials of M., the author himself, who was chosen by none other than Sri Ramakrishna to be his

scribe. Ramakrishna said to M.: 'The Divine Mother has told me that you have to do a little work for her. You will have to teach the Bhagavata, the word of God, to humanity. God binds the Bhagavata pandit to the world with one tie; otherwise, who would remain to explain the sacred book? ... That is why the Divine Mother has kept you in the world.'<sup>3</sup>

M. started to keep a diary in 1867, when he was a young student, and when he finally met Ramakrishna in February, 1882, M. explained, 'That is when my habit of maintaining a diary really became fruitful. ... There were many people around the Master, but he made me write the chronicle' (ibid.).

Not only was M. chosen as the Master's scribe, but the accuracy of his memory was also periodically tested. On 9 November 1884, Sri Ramakrishna asked M., 'How did you like today's conversation? ... What did I say?' M. replied: 'God takes upon Himself complete responsibility for one who totally depends upon Him. He is like a guardian taking charge of a minor. You also told us that at a feast a child cannot by himself find a place to eat his meal; someone finds a place for him.' Sri Ramakrishna countered, 'No, that is not quite to the point. I said that the child doesn't fall if the father leads him and holds his hand.'<sup>4</sup>

Because M. could not visit Ramakrishna as often as he wished, he used to note down his words so that he could deeply reflect upon them between visits and the mental impression would then remain fresh in his mind. Furthermore, to accurately recollect Ramakrishna's conversations, M. used to memorise the Master's words. 'And then after returning home,' he explained, 'I



would write brief notes in my diary. Sometimes I would spend the whole night in completing my record. Later I would fill in all the details from memory. Sometimes I would spend seven days completing the record of one day's happening.' M. further explained:

Thus *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* appeared in book form from the notes of my diary. Sometimes I had to wait for a word of the Master's to come to my mind as a *chataka* bird waits for a drop of rainwater to fall. Sometimes I meditated on one scene over a thousand times. As a result I could vividly visualize the Master's divine play, though it had happened long before. By the grace of the Master I used to feel that his play had just happened. Therefore one can say that it was written in the Master's presence. At times I would not be satisfied with a particular description of an episode, so I would get absorbed in meditation on the Master. Then the correct picture would vividly appear in my mind.<sup>5</sup>

Is it no wonder that Swami Shivananda stated: 'M. is a great soul. He is Vedavyasa in the Ramakrishna Incarnation' (364). Without M.'s rigorous sense of perfection and powers of memorization and meditation which he applied to recall Ramakrishna's conversations and teachings verbatim, the *Gospel* would not have the power and ability to draw us today.

Swami Brahmananda told his young monks, 'Whenever you teach and give lectures, quote the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. His words throw a clearer light on the scriptures and help to bring home the true import of their meaning.'<sup>6</sup> This bears true, not only for Vedanta congregations, but also for other religious assemblies in America as well. Once in the 1970s when a senior Vedanta nun visited a friend in Chattanooga, Tennessee, she accompanied her to a Southern Baptist church. There, from the pulpit, she was astonished to hear the preacher retelling

Ramakrishna's *Gospel* parable of the pundit who could not swim. In today's internet age, it is no longer surprising to hear a Ramakrishna parable crop up in an outside venue or even in conversations with complete strangers.

What is it about Ramakrishna's parables that are, although nineteenth-century-rural India in flavour, so compelling to contemporary Western sensibilities? First, they speak the language of universality, and, second, the truth contained in the parables is driven home by an unmistakable power. Once when Sikh soldiers asked Ramakrishna how to live in the world, the Master immediately had the vision of a husking machine.<sup>7</sup> He would then teach again and again the same universal truth that was first divinely inspired by that vision:

In Kamarpukur I have seen the women of carpenter families making flattened rice with a husking-machine. One woman kicks the end of the wooden beam, and another woman, while nursing her baby, turns the paddy in the mortar dug in the earth. The second woman is always alert lest the pestle of the machine should fall on her hand. With the other hand she fries the soaked paddy in a pan. Besides, she is talking with customers; she says: 'You owe us so much money. Please pay it before you go.' Likewise, do your different duties in the world, fixing your mind on God. But practice is necessary, and one should also be alert. Only in this way can one safeguard both—God and the world.<sup>8</sup>

Not only does *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*

The upshot of the whole thing is that, no matter what path you follow, yoga is impossible unless the mind becomes quiet. The mind of a yogi is under his control; he is not under the control of his mind. When the mind is quiet the prana stops functioning. Then one gets kumbhaka. —*Gospel*, 248.

offer today's Westerners firsthand conversations of an avatar that are chockful of parables and teachings, and which are divinely inspired, practical, and universal in their truths, it challenges contemporary Western seekers to ask themselves deeper questions. Blanche, an American devotee, explained to me: 'In the Gospel, Ramakrishna stresses devotion and love of God and asks for more love of God. As I was reading the Gospel, I found myself asking, "Do I love God?"' Blanche continued: 'Ramakrishna makes us go deeper. He pushes us to think more deeply in spiritual life. He helps me to focus on what is really real, rather than what is not.'

Not only does Ramakrishna reset our priority gauge for what is meaningful in spiritual life, but for Westerners raised in a Judeo-Christian tradition, he also points out novel truths never before considered, such as: the truth that there are different approaches to God—dualism, qualified non-dualism, and non-dualism. One Westerner explained: 'Sri Ramakrishna reveals a religion of non-exclusivity. He shows us that real religion is about the Self—whatever name we choose to call it. What other world religion does that?'

Furthermore, in the *Gospel*, Ramakrishna not only teaches that all religions lead to same goal, but that the one goal can be mined through any—or a variety of combinations—of the four yogas: jnana yoga, the path of knowledge; bhakti yoga, the path of devotion; raja yoga, the path of mind control and meditation; and karma yoga, the path of selfless action. Thus Ramakrishna's teaching is both universal in its goal and universal in its methodologies to reach that goal. This appeals to a democracy- or freedom-loving Westerner.

Moreover, that same goal can be found in Ramakrishna himself, who was the recipient of all realizations—dualistic, qualified non-dualistic, non-dualistic, including the vision of God as Mother, Father, Child, Friend, Beloved, and the

visions of Christ and Allah—an unprecedented and unparalleled emblem of a universal religion.

In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, we read how the Master could not only bestow the vision of a devotee's chosen ideal but would also become transfigured into the devotee's chosen ideal. Such spiritual experiences are enacted before our mind's eye through M.'s firsthand account. In the 31 October 1885 entry of the *Gospel*, we read:

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna was sitting in his room with the devotees. He was talking to a Christian devotee named Misra. ... Though clad in European dress he wore the ochre cloth of a sannyasi under his foreign clothes. ...

Sri Ramakrishna said ... within Misra's hearing: '... He who is called "God" by the Christians is addressed by the Hindus as Rama, Krishna, Isvara, and by other names. A lake has many ghats. The Hindus drink water at one ghat and call it "jal"; the Christians at another, and call it "water"; the Mussalmans at a third, and call it "pani". Likewise, He who is God to the Christians is Allah to the Mussalmans.'

Misra: 'Jesus is not the son of Mary. He is God Himself. (To the devotees) Now he (pointing to Sri Ramakrishna) is as you see him—again, he is God Himself. You are not able to recognize him. I have seen him before, in visions, though I see him now directly with my eyes. ...

(Ramakrishna) went into samadhi ...

Regaining partial consciousness, he fixed his gaze on Misra and began to laugh. Still in an ecstatic mood, he shook hands with him and laughed again. Taking him by the hands, he said, 'You will get what you are seeking' (922).

Before the Western reader's very own eyes, Sri Ramakrishna bestowed on his Christian devotee his universal teaching along with his unfathomable grace.



Finally we find comfort in reading the *Gospel* as a play revealing real life situations and problems that are not always rectified, even within the life of God-incarnate—whether it was relatives of the Master who continually tormented him and taxed his patience, debauched devotees whom the Master never ceased loving, or immoral women whom the Master saw as the blissful Mother, yet who remained prostitutes. We see that with all the obstacles, hardships, and stresses of life, the only way out for us is through self-transformation.

But in the process, as we read the *Gospel*, we make friends with the various characters within its pages—and their foibles. We see how young monastics, like Rakhal, suffered anger which served as a pivotal point for the Master's instruction to him; how Yogin's soft-heartedness was reprimanded and Niranjan's fury subdued; that Hazra remained a hypocrite and plot-thickener in spite of his proximity to the Master, making it possible for us to also recognise the inevitable 'Hazra' in our own situations in life; how Bankim, the successful artist, seemed so arrogant and worldly in the rarified setting of Sri Ramakrishna's company; and Balaram, an extraordinarily pious devotee, could also exhibit an amusing dose of miserliness; while Girish, a debauched renegade, was transformed into a staunch devotee and holy man. These real life play enactments on the Dakshineswar stage, with Sri Ramakrishna as the lead actor, impress on devotees what they can—or cannot—realistically expect to change in their own lives. And how the Master accepted and included all the diverse characters that entered his divine play.

For the contemporary reader, the *Gospel* is a spiritual classic. It is both a rich and treasured handbook of practical knowledge and a unique and sacred window into the day-to-day realm of an avatar—a powerful real-life drama that has proven universal and ageless.



Sri Ramakrishna's Parable of Jal-Pani-Aqua

## References

1. See Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 77–8.
2. Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1971), 219.
3. Swami Chetanananda, *Mahendra Nath Gupta: The Recorder of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (St. Louis: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 2011), 242.
4. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 662–3.
5. *Mahendra Nath Gupta*, 243. Emphasis added.
6. *Eternal Companion*, 236.
7. Swami Yogeshananda, *The Visions of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1973), 104.
8. *Gospel*, 428–9.

Why shouldn't one be able to attain spirituality, living the life of a householder? But it is extremely difficult. Sages like Janaka entered the world after attaining Knowledge. But still the world is a place of terror. Even a detached householder has to be careful.—*Gospel*, 250.



## Sri Ramakrishna Vachanaveda: *A Nonpareil Gem*

**Swami Atmajnananda**

**T**HE CLEAR INFLUENCE of Sri Ramakrishna and his chief disciple Swami Vivekananda on Indian thought and literature as seen from the nineteenth century onwards is well recognised and surprisingly this churning of ideas and renewed interest in the proverbial Indian wisdom can be seen even

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during the last decade of the eighteenth century in several parts of India. This surge of reformation and rejuvenation started from reformers like Sri Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sri Keshab Chandra Sen, and Sri Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar and found its culmination in the combined force that was Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Reports of Swamiji's success in the World Parliament of Religions and his awakening call to the Indian masses during his travel from Colombo to

Almora, spread like wildfire and the urgency with which a messiah for the regeneration of India was identified baffles us.

Western education, literature, and the allurement of a seemingly prosperous culture had deeply unsettled the religious beliefs and life patterns of the Indians during those times. A strong wave of freedom from all types of bondages and established conventions started forming and this wave gained momentum from the path breaking life of Sri Ramakrishna. Unconventional in his approach but yet syncretic, he provided a solid foundation for a resurgent India. Keeping the spiritual core intact, he assimilated all the religious paths and practices that he could set his eyes on and by his influence, inclusiveness became the dominant feature of India. While the social reformers were intellectuals and great organisers as also orators, Sri Ramakrishna was unlettered and absolutely non-commercial! He stirred hearts from within and set in motion a movement that is rapidly expanding! Swamiji gave expression to this central character of India, namely inclusiveness as taught by his Master, in his first address at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, when he said, 'not tolerance but acceptance'.

### ***Influence of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in Kannada literature:***

Kannada literature did not lag behind in adapting to this new scenario and soon absorbed the grand ideas of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. The princely state of Mysore, now Mysuru, had given great importance to spreading Western education by starting schools and colleges. It must be appreciated that at the same time, arrangements to teach and elucidate the scriptures was also done systematically through publications of scriptures in Kannada and by starting Sanskrit schools.

The attraction of Western literature and the craze to imitate Western methods, as already

mentioned, was eating into the 'English' educated in all parts of the then British India. Sri Ramakrishna was well aware of such fads and also fond of mimicking the ways of these 'babus' to side-splitting laughter from his young disciples and devotees. By his influence, a change in the thinking of the educated classes was seen initially in the then capital Calcutta, now Kolkata. Newspaper reports and articles on his remarkable life and teachings appeared frequently and helped dilute the western trend that was making roadways into the Indian psyche. Calcutta, the capital of British Raj was keenly watched and followed by the rest of India. So, it is but natural that this change in perception percolated to other parts.

However, how does Sri Ramakrishna who was from a small unknown village of Bengal and speaking in the local dialect, appeal to people from other regions of India? Cultural barriers, language barriers, and most importantly the mental blocks of Indians from various regions, all seemed to evaporate in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna's intense spiritual experiences. He had touched the core of human existence and all these external coverings were reformed and reshaped in spite of themselves.

It is not surprising that the people of Karnataka took to the intense spiritual approach of Sri Ramakrishna, for they were already imbued with the rich culture of *Dasasahitya*, the compositions of saint poets like Purandaradasa, Kanakadasa, and so on. Again, they were willing to accept change in their religious attitudes due to the influence of *Vachanasahitya* by saint-reformers like Basavanna, and so on. The songs that were dear to Sri Ramakrishna and those

In genuine love of God there is no desire. Only through such love does one speedily realize God. Attainment of supernatural powers and so on—these are desires.  
—Gospel, 252.



that appear in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were echoing the ideas and emotions that were already known to the Kannada people. All aspects of *navarasa* bhakti, nine modes of devotion to God, were popular due to the influence of Sri Ramanujacharya and Sri Madhvacharya, the proponents of Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita philosophies respectively. Interestingly Sri Ramanujacharya lived in Melkote, Karnataka for many years, while Madhvacharya lived in Udupi all through. Shringeri, the seat of Advaita philosophy is also in Karnataka and Buddhists, Jains, Shaivites, and many other sects have well established centres in the region. The ground was ready to receive the unifying message of Sri Ramakrishna that looked beyond the narrow confines of sects and bigoted outlook. Swamiji touched many places in Karnataka and the admiration for this iconic monk led the people to Sri Ramakrishna, whose expansive reach slowly enveloped the fertile soil of Karnataka.

A paradigm shift can be seen in Kannada literature too during the early nineteenth century with the rise of 'Navodaya', a movement that was also influenced by the freedom struggle and Mahatma Gandhi.

Most of the now famous Kannada writers and poets were deeply influenced by the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and by the inspiring words of Swamiji. There are references that a famous Kannada writer, B Venkatacharya (1845–1914) had the opportunity to meet Swamiji as a wandering monk at Pondicherry in Tamil Nadu and also accompanied him to Madras, now Chennai. He had already translated quite a few Bengali novels into Kannada and Swamiji was surprised by his love for Bengali literature. Records reveal that even during the lifetime of Swamiji, in 1898, a newspaper was started in Mysuru with the name, 'Vivekananda' and the editor of this newspaper, Sri Venkatakrishnaiah

was keen on spreading noble religious ideas. 'This newspaper has been started to immortalise the name of Srimat Vivekananda Saraswati who is the supreme teacher of the whole world and who popularised the religion of the Vedas in various parts of America and Europe ... *vivekamut-padya janan anandayateti Vivekanandaha*'; he who brings delight by kindling discrimination. However this newspaper did not survive long.

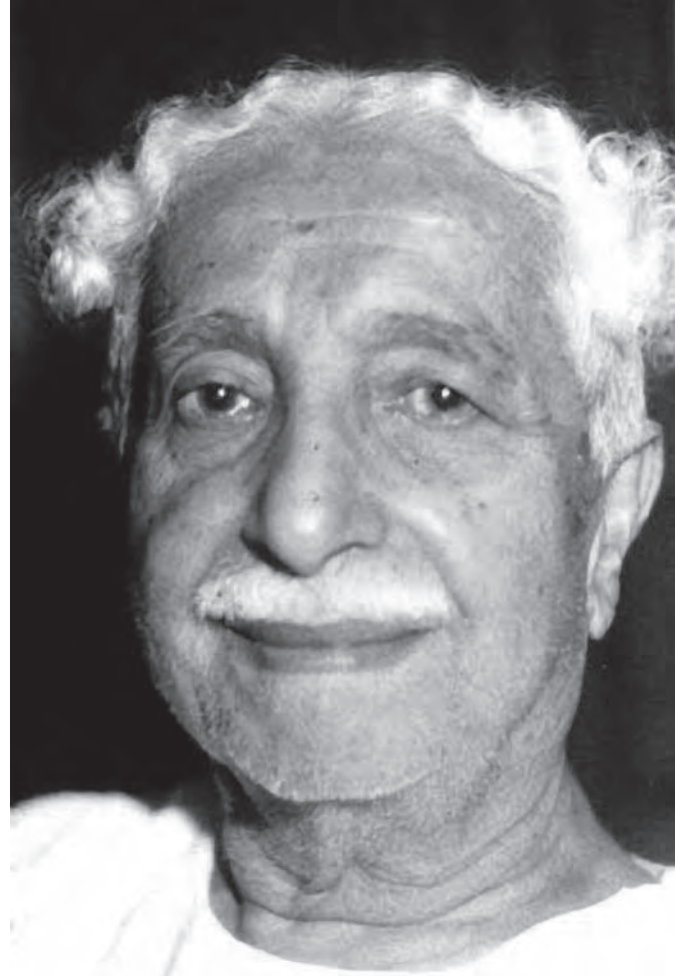
D V Gundappa, popularly known as D V G (1887–1975), was associated with the Bangalore, now Bengaluru, Ramakrishna Ashrama from the initial days and had met its then president, Swami Atmananda, an illustrious disciple of Swamiji. When Swami Abhedananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, came to Bangalore in 1909 after his western tour, according welcome to him, D V G had written some verses in English on the greatness of Vedanta, the ideals of Swamiji and Abhedananda's coming to Sri Ramakrishna. He was also probably the first to write poems on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in Kannada. A compilation of his poems titled *Vasantakusumanjali* was published in 1922 and he mentions there that the poems were written during the previous six to seven years. He eulogises Sri Ramakrishna as one akin to Acharya Shankara and other great men, expressing deep regard for his divine insight and spiritual attainments. 'Swami Vivekananda, the leader of India's freedom march; honoured by the enlightened', is how he pays homage to Swamiji.<sup>1</sup>

*Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsara Charithre* was the first Kannada publication on the life of Sri Ramakrishna, published by Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore in January 1919 and this was authored by the two famous writers of neo Kannada literature, T S Venkannaiah and A R Krishna-shastri. They were popular as the *Ashvini Devatas* of Kannada literature and they primarily followed the pattern of Swami Saradananda's Bengali *Sri Sri*

*Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*, with elaborate discussions on the contemporary context.

*Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsara Upadeshavalī*, the second publication in the series 'Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama Granthamala', was the first book on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna translated into Kannada by Sri Nangapuram Venkatesha Iyengar and published in South India as early as January 1919. Nangapuram was closely associated with the Bangalore Ashrama and was also instrumental in establishing the Kannada Sahitya Parishat. In his preface to the first edition, he says: 'The essence of Vedanta shines through Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. He incarnated to resolve the conflicts between various religions and paths and pointed out that they differ only in name. Those who read his words will be convinced, without doubt, of the Vedic dictum, *ekam sat vipra bahuda vadanti*.' The foreword to this book was written by one of the greatest scholars of those times, Sri Doddabele Narayanashastri. On the significance of Sri Ramakrishna's message, he says: 'Our countrymen have become like sheep, blindly following anyone who foolishly claims that this is the right path and again another who indiscriminately claims that this path is not correct. Alas! Your sweet counsel is going unheeded!' He also says that Sri Ramakrishna's teachings can without hesitation or hindrance, penetrate the walls of caste, creed, religion, race, and nationality.

The Kannada translation of the first part of the Bengali classic *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, written by Sri Mahendranath Gupta or 'M.' was first published as *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamrita* by the Bangalore Ramakrishna Ashrama in 1925 and the final part in 1933; the translator was the famous poet Sri S J Govindaraja Iyengar. Swami Srivasananda, who was then serving in Bangalore and Mysore centres of the Ramakrishna Order, was a relative of the translators



K V Puttappa, 'Kuvempu'

and inspired him to learn the Bengali language for doing a faithful translation.

During the same period, another important book in Kannada, *Sri Ramakrishna Charitamrita: Paramahamsara Sadhana, siddhi, Upadesha Sahita* on Sri Ramakrishna by Sri Ranganatha Ramachandra Divakar was published by Hubballi Adhyatma Karyalaya in the year 1931. This gave a very factual and historical account of Sri Ramakrishna's life, highlighting his relevance to the modern days. R R Divakar, the author, was also deeply influenced by Swamiji.

**T**oo much study of the scriptures does more harm than good. The important thing is to know the essence of the scriptures. After that, what is the need of books? One should learn the essence and then dive deep in order to realize God.

—Gospel, 255.



Dr G S Shivarudrappa

Dr Dattatreya Ramachandra Bendre aka Da Ra Bendre, another luminary in Kannada literary world realised the urgency of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology and began writing articles in various journals and periodicals by 1930 itself. He has described the coming of Sri Ramakrishna as the descent of the spiritual soul of India and the present age as 'manavayuga, the age of man' with Sri Ramakrishna as the new 'Manu'. He has composed many poems on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. He was honoured with the Jnanpith Award for his work *Nakutanti*, four strings, in which is published, a celebrated poem on Swamiji, *Sri Vivekananda Shikhara Pragatha*.

Dr Masti Venkatesha Iyengar is a name synonymous with short stories in Kannada literature. On the occasion of the Sri Ramakrishna's birth centenary year in 1936, he wrote a life story of Sri Ramakrishna which is actually a study of his openness to experiment while being rooted in tradition. Dr Shivaram Karant, another name to be reckoned with in Kannada literature, although an agnostic, translated *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, originally published by Advaita

Ashrama, Mayavati into Kannada in 1952 and he says that he undertook the task as his mother wanted to read the book! He has dealt with the subject with great respect and admits that his life has been enriched in the process. Sri Ramakrishna is appreciated even today as is evident by the recent statement by an author: 'The Paramahansa is an illustrious example of how one single being can be the conduit for so many mediums and expressions. Destroying none, he integrated and combined all that was noble continuously.'<sup>2</sup>

The contribution of Dr Kuppali Venkatappa Puttappa aka Kuvempu in spreading the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology in Kannada literature is unparalleled. Even as a student, he was guided and given shelter in the Mysore Ramakrishna Ashrama by Swami Siddheswarananda. Swami Ranganathananda was then a novice in the Mysore Ashrama and would later reminisce on those days of the Ashrama with evident nostalgia. Kuvempu was fortunate to get initiated in Belur Math in 1929 by Swami Shivananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Kuvempu lived for ten years in the Mysore Ashrama. His two biographies, one on Sri Ramakrishna published in 1934 and the other on Swami Vivekananda published in 1932 are inspiring masterpieces. One can see the influence of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda in all his writings; be it prose, poetry or ballads. His ideas and philosophy were a retelling of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology which gets amply reflected in his magnum opus *Sri Ramayana Darshanam* which won the Jnanpith Award. His foreword to the Kannada translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* written in 1954 when the complete Kannada version of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* was published, conveys his deep conviction about the spiritual genius of Sri Ramakrishna. No other language can boast of such a masterly introduction to the *Gospel*. More about this later.



Kannada literature took a new form during the Indian independence struggle and also after gaining independence. The influence of Western literature brought in a new pattern of literature that focussed on social issues, politics, and agnosticism. In spite of this major shift Dr G S Shivarudrappa, Prof. Chennaveera Kanavi, Prof. Nissar Ahmed, and other important poets, belonging to this period, have written beautiful poems on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and have acknowledged their great contribution to humanity and Indian culture. When the new edition of the Kannada translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* was published in 1954 by the Mysore Ramakrishna Ashrama as *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanaveda*, all the Bengali songs were translated into Kannada by Dr G S Shivarudrappa. The songs are very popular and are recognised as a major contribution to Kannada literature.

Swami Shastrananda and Swami Tadrupananda have penned some beautiful poems in Kannada on Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swamiji, which include translations of some of the popular Bengali songs. Swami Purushottamananda composed soulful music to most of the Kannada versions of the songs in *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanaveda* and they are very widely appreciated. *Sugama sangita*, a genre of popular and folk music uses some of these songs from *Vachanaveda* and one can hear them often during radio and stage programmes. Swami Purushottamananda has also contributed immensely to Kannada literature through his popular and exhaustive biographies on Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swamiji, apart from motivational books for students that are based on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideas. Dr Prabhushankara, a disciple of Swami Yatiswarananda, was closely associated with the centres in Bengaluru and Mysuru and has also written a book on the life of

Swamiji and translated many other books into Kannada. He was instrumental in publishing the Kannada version of all the volumes of Swami Ranganathananda's *Eternal Values for A Changing Society*. While he was the director of the publishing department of the Mysore University, he published *A Bibliography of Swami Vivekananda* that includes all references to works on Swamiji. Prof. H N Muralidhara has also written various articles on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideology and some beautiful poems which include translations of popular Bengali songs. Swami Nityasthananda thoroughly revised *Swami Vivekanandara Kritishreni*, the Kannada translation of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* and has also authored many books and articles on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.

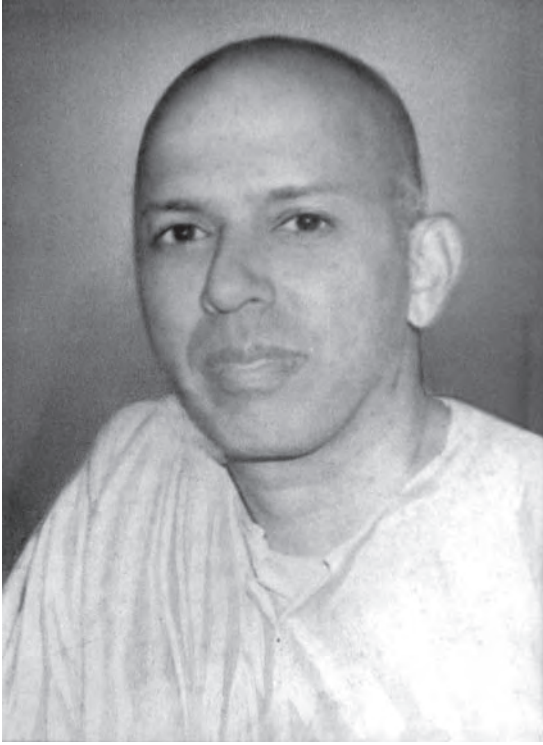
The above details clearly show that the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement is well established in Karnataka and enjoys the highest regard, both from traditional sects and new movements.

### **Unique features of the Kannada translation of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna**

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the record of the conversations and other incidental details during the last few years in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, is well acclaimed as unique in religious literature. Nearly illiterate, Sri Ramakrishna did not have the flourish of an accomplished orator but his simple words and rural idioms,

**A** man should reach the Nitya, the Absolute, by following the trail of the Lila, the Relative. It is like reaching the roof by the stairs. After realizing the Absolute, he should climb down to the Relative and live on that plane in the company of devotees, charging his mind with the love of God. This is my final and most mature opinion.

—Gospel, 257.



Swami Tadrupananda (d. 5 May 1978)

clothed his deepest mystical experiences with a natural charm and captivated the listeners. The wonderful stories and analogies that he would always use were culled from his keen observation of rural and village happenings, but were effective in conveying the highest truths! Aldous Huxley in his foreword to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* says:

Never have the small events of a contemplative's daily life been described with such a wealth of intimate detail. Never have the casual and unstudied utterances of a great religious teacher been set down with so minute a fidelity ... To read through these conversations in which mystical doctrine alternates with an unfamiliar kind of humour, and where discussions of the oldest aspects of Hindu mythology give place to the most profound and subtle utterances about the nature of Ultimate Reality, is in itself a liberal education in humility, tolerance and suspense of judgment.<sup>3</sup>

In his introduction to *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanaveda*, translated by Dr Prabhushankara and published by Mysuru Ramakrishna Ashrama as *A Homage to Gospel* in December 2004, Kuvempu says:

M.'s *Kathamrita* was translated into Kannada several years ago and was published under the title *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamrita* by the Ramakrishna Ashrama at Bengaluru. But the translation was not considered up to the mark. 'M.' has recorded the words of the Master as he pronounced them. Conversations, usually, are not carried on in a literary style. The language used is colloquial. It has no tinge of literary artificiality. While reading it, one feels that one is sitting close to Sri Ramakrishna and listening to him. In the midst of profound spiritual discourses, one also listens to jokes and anecdotes that cause side-splitting laughter—and all these in simple spoken Bengali language. Therefore the present Kannada translation is intended to maintain the flavour of the simplicity of the original spoken language, avoiding as much as possible literary sophistication of expression.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding 'M.', the chronicler of the *Gospel*, Kuvempu says with evident admiration:

'M.'s first visit to Sri Ramakrishna, as detailed by 'M.' himself reveals how Sri Ramakrishna looked forward to the arrival of 'M.' as eagerly as he did in the case of Narendra. The Paramahansa needed Narendra to explode on the world with his powerful personality as a prelude to the acceptance of the message of Sri Ramakrishna. And so was Mahendra Nath Gupta, of a benign nature, direly needed to record the world-transforming divine utterances of Sri Ramakrishna in his own language, and to also record the day-to-day occurrences comprising the lighter and exalted moods of the Master in great detail. He was to nurture them all in the cradle of his memory, with motherly care, so that it could in turn nourish the world in later years ... Gupta, the surname of 'M'

literally means 'secret', and in consonance with this meaning, he recorded all that he witnessed or heard from the Master without making his work known to the public, and he himself remained anonymous, as though he was born to do this ministry (13–4).

As to the relevance and sanctity of the *Gospel*, Kuvempu says in his inimitable style, foreseeing its universal appeal:

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is a veritable place of pilgrimage on one's palm. But unlike a temple or a place of pilgrimage, there is no chance of its getting polluted. Nor is there any chance of its getting dilapidated like the structure of a temple. The home that houses this *Gospel* will itself become a temple. The hand that holds it will be holding the very lotus feet of the Lord. The tongue on which its letters roll will be savouring nectar itself. The *Gospel* is the repository of bliss; it is the ocean of peace; it is the manna of divine knowledge. It is the friend that stands by you in the hour of trial; it is the Guru that at the moment of overwhelming joy counsels humility and devotion, and makes you feel that you are an offering at the Lord's feet. It is the torch that shows your way in darkness; it is the staff to lean upon while trudging on an uneven path. It is the pole star that guides you when you are lost in wilderness. It is the quintessence of the Vedas and the Upanishads. After reading it even the most ordinary literate need not feel jealous of any scholar; nor does he feel inferior to any scholar of eminence. On the other hand, he feels that by the grace of God none is more blessed than himself; he attains peace and fulfilment. He acquires the vastness of the sky, the height of the highest mountains, and the dignity of the ocean. Never before had God incarnated in such an approachable form, nor had the voice of God shaped itself into a book that could be read and understood by the most ordinary of men and women (14–5).

As to the title, *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanaveda*

that was personally chosen by Kuvempu, an elaborate explanation is found, also in his introduction:

Veda means eternal knowledge ... since the Vedas that are beyond our comprehension are infinite, the Vedas that will materialise before us are also bound to be infinite. In the light of this, where is any impropriety in calling the rich compendium of the utterances of Sri Ramakrishna, a man of perfection, a *rishi* and a great incarnation, the Veda? Incidentally, this Veda accomplishes what the old Vedas failed to achieve—namely penetrating such hovels, which were, according to some people, beneath their dignity to enter. This *Vachana Veda* will emancipate the common masses immersed in superstition from the confines fabricated by the priestly class. This *Vachana Veda* will free them from the shackles of religious slavery, rid them of their inferiority complex and illumine their minds. It will ultimately lead us all to spiritual liberation (17–8).

On the urgency of recognising the global ramifications of Sri Ramakrishna's message, he says further:

It would be fitting to call India 'a country of harmony'. This vision of harmony of religions was gifted to India, nay to the whole world, by Sri Ramakrishna, long before this country gained independence. Such a vision of harmony had its genesis in the saint's personal experience. The wisdom and validity of this idea can be grasped by one and all. This idea of harmony of religions may sound revolutionary but it does not militate against India's tradition. *Vachana Veda* is truly the modern 'Veda'. Expressed in simple colloquial language, it is indeed a presentation of his vision of universality and harmony. The

A guileless man easily realizes God. There are two paths: the path of righteousness and the path of wickedness. One should follow the path of righteousness.

—*Gospel*, 258.




*Vachana Veda*, like a wild forest fire will scorch barbaric practices like religious conversion, extolling one's own religion by defaming other religions, and artificially increasing the numbers of their following for political gains (19–20).

Kuvempu stressed the importance of the *Gospel*: 'If the tree of Indian Constitution has to bear fruits, there is no other way it can do other than to nourish it with energising ideas embedded in the *Vachanaveda*. *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanaveda* will form a religious constitution, a companion to our political constitution' (ibid.). Swami Siddheswarananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciple Swami Brahmananda, and also the founder president of the Mysuru Ramakrishna Ashrama had nurtured Kuvempu in the Ashrama's student home and had also made arrangements to take him along with him to Kolkata and Belur Math. During this visit, Kuvempu had the blessed opportunity to meet 'M.'. Learning that the young boy was an accomplished poet, 'M.' wanted to hear one of his songs on Sri Ramakrishna in Kannada. Delighted by listening to it with much affection, he asked for the Bengali translation to be made and sent to him. That however never happened in his lifetime. Regretting this lapse, Kuvempu included the song as invocation in *Vachanaveda*. A few lines of the song are given here:

When the blue firmament of India  
was veiled in darkness,  
When our countrymen had forgotten  
their goal of life  
and were immersed in slumber deep,  
O, Paramahansa, you appeared on the horizon  
like the rising sun.

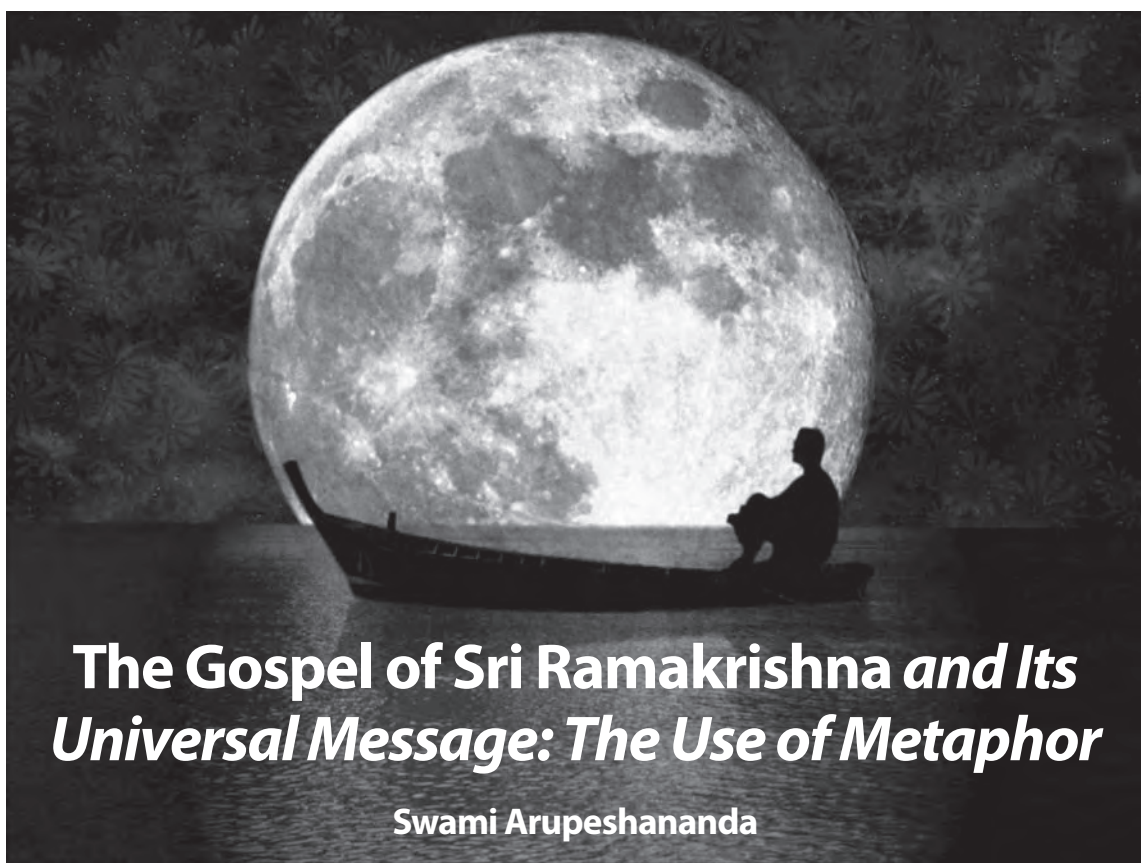
*Sri Ramakrishna Vachanaveda* has seen fourteen editions and many reprints and a large number of copies of both the volumes have been sold. *Sankshipta Vachanaveda* or *Condensed Gospel* has also been published and well

received. There are many compilations of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings and parables and also stories of his life to cater to various sections of society. Can this be considered a measure of *Vachanaveda's* popularity as a spiritual treatise and classic or as a yardstick to measure the acceptance of Sri Ramakrishna by the Kannada people? Certainly, yes.

In conclusion we must admit that Sri Ramakrishna is an influence to reckon with and he has proved that pristine spiritual values have universal appeal. A magnet to all spiritual seekers, he uplifts them to greater dimensions of Reality. An ennobler of all classes of people, he is the one prophet who does not deny anybody; the only hope for a peaceful planet and above all a potent spiritual force that can counter the mad rush of today's consumeristic society. With nothing to claim as his own, he was humble enough to acknowledge that all his ideas too were thrown open to him by the Divine Mother! He was supremely happy as a child of his 'Mother' and that inner joy still touches us as we read his words and listen to him singing! He continues to live and inspire through the *Gospel* for eternity. It is the intrinsic appeal of Sri Ramakrishna that we find in any version of the *Gospel* and *Vachanaveda* has successfully carried that appeal to the hearts of the Kannada people. 

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# The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and Its Universal Message: The Use of Metaphor

Swami Arupeshananda

## The Problem of Metaphor

**B**EFORE TALKING ABOUT the use of metaphor in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, I would like to talk about the problem of metaphor in spiritual traditions. In much of the world, and especially in the West, we find a contest for truth between science and religion. Science claims one thing, and some religious text, the Bible, Koran, Vedas, or whatever, seem to claim something contradictory.

The reactions to this fall into a few general categories. First, we can reject science. ‘The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it,’ is the cry of the fundamentalist Christian. Another reaction is to reject religion, and many have done this. A different reaction was given to me by a Mormon scientist who claimed that both science and

religion are true, but cannot be reconciled by the human mind: only God is capable of this.

Another reaction is to invent our own science that is consistent with our own interpretation of our own favourite scripture. Efforts in this direction range from the idiotic, for example, Noah brought dinosaurs on the Ark—it didn’t sink because he only brought eggs,<sup>1</sup> to the extremely sophisticated, which could fill an entire essay in this journal. As an example of the latter, I knew a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles, who was doing her dissertation in theoretical solid state physics and spending her spare time on apologetics—which in her case amounted to an effort to reconcile modern physics with the Genesis creation myth. She was very bright, her husband was a similarly inclined physics graduate student at the California Institute of Technology, and she had spent years of her life developing an extremely

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elaborate mathematical framework to create a map between these two seemingly mutually exclusive explanations of the modern world.

While she obviously had a great deal of energy to devote to her religion, one cannot help but think that it could have been more fruitfully directed. If she had been willing to look at parts of her teachings as metaphorical instead of literal truths, then she might have been able to channel her religious practice in a more rewarding way. Vedanta clearly states the need to appreciate the Truth in all its varied forms, and that while Truth remains one, these forms can and do change in order to suit changing times. To quote Swami Vivekananda: "Truth remains ever unchanged, but it can only be presented in a 'form'; so from time to time a new 'form' or expression is given to Truth, as the progress of mankind makes them ready to receive it."<sup>2</sup> The idea of a Garden of Eden and a serpent is a form given long ago that would at best be extremely difficult to fit into current ideas about quantum field theory and science in general.

This was not just a quirky hobby practiced by a lone eccentric graduate student. A slightly different approach to apologetics was put on grand public display in the academic world in the mid-1990s.

*The Parable of Pundit who did not Know Swimming*



This time the emphasis was on proving intelligent design, and a mathematician, a computer scientist, and a physicist teamed up to search for hidden messages and predictions in the Torah.

This is actually an old and tired crusade. According to orthodox Jewish belief, the Torah was dictated to Moses directly by God, and the idea of finding information encoded in it indicative of intelligent design goes back at least to the thirteenth century.<sup>3</sup> What made the relatively recent attempt interesting was that the trio used computers and vented their technical fury on the problem to systematically subject all 304, 805 letters of the Torah to their search. The method they used is called 'Equidistant Letter Sequencing', and the basic idea is to count every  $n$  letters to find messages or predictions. The actual process is far more complex than this, and they claimed their method gave positive results. Their work was—in hindsight, amazingly—accepted and published in a distinguished mathematical journal.<sup>4</sup> The paper was later successfully discredited,<sup>5</sup> but only after it had spawned a best-selling book claiming to predict the assassination of the Jewish Prime Minister<sup>6</sup> and a movie about the end of the world.<sup>7</sup>

What all these positions have in common is a failure to understand metaphor. The graduate student struggled furiously to map literal meaning to the Genesis creation myth, and the academic team tried to extract encoded literal meaning from anywhere in the Torah. One might argue that the Garden of Eden story is allegory and not metaphor, and that the team searched not just metaphor, but allegory, simile, metonymy, analogy, and so on, in their attempt. In order to avoid hair-splitting arguments in this essay, I'm going to lump together metaphor, allegory, and so on, into a single category—the subtle differences are largely lost in translation anyway—and address the issue from there.



What all these terms have in common is the explanation of an unfamiliar idea in terms of a more familiar one, and what the situations above share in common is the fallacy that the familiar idea used for this purpose is literal instead of illustrative. The examples given above are mostly just curious, but when people take statements such as ‘Death to the infidel’<sup>8</sup> from the Koran or some of the more draconian rules found in the book of Leviticus literally, the situation can become much more serious.

### **The Solution: Why the Gospel?**

One of the nice things about *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is that Sri Ramakrishna points out the limitations of analogy explicitly. One cannot read this book and cherish a literal interpretation of it. In an exchange with Bankim Chandra, Sri Ramakrishna gives an analogy which the pundit disparages:

Master: ... A man is liberated after attaining Knowledge, after realizing God. For him there is no further coming back to earth. If a boiled paddy-grain is sown, it doesn’t sprout. Just so, if a man is boiled by the fire of Knowledge, he cannot take part any more in the play of creation; he cannot lead a worldly life, for he has no attachment to ‘woman and gold’. What will you gain by sowing boiled paddy?

Bankim (smiling): Sir, neither does a weed serve the purpose of a tree.

Master: But you cannot call a jnani a weed. He who has realized God has obtained the fruit of Immortality—not a common fruit like a gourd or a pumpkin. He is free from rebirth. He is not born anywhere—on earth, in the solar world, or in the lunar world.

Analogy is one-sided. You are a pundit; haven’t you read logic? Suppose you say that a man is as terrible as a tiger. That doesn’t mean that he has a fearful tail or a tiger’s pot-face! (All laugh.)<sup>9</sup>

Bankim is a worldly man, and his criticism reflects the high value he places on worldly life. In his opinion leading a worldly life can be good and productive, so he compares it to a tree, which bears fruit and provides shade, and so on. On the other hand, he sees no point in renunciation, and so compares it to a weed, which has no immediate use. Sri Ramakrishna, being a man of God, points out the value of spiritual practice. He then states the very important idea that just because an analogy can be interpreted in ways perverse to its intended meaning does not compromise the truth it is meant to illustrate; it merely demonstrates the limitations of analogy. Later in the book, Dr Sarkar makes a similar mistake (874–5).

### **Some Examples in the Gospel**

In the previous exchange the Master pointed out the limitation of analogy—but not all analogies are equally limited. Many years ago a monk gave me a particularly bad analogy and when I challenged him on it, he cited this portion of the *Gospel* in his defence. His position was that any shortcoming in an analogy is due to the inherent limitation of analogy which the Master is pointing out, and not to the quality of the analogy he chose. This lets aspiring analogisers off the hook a bit too easily.

So what makes an analogy—or more broadly, and in the spirit of this essay, a comparison—good or bad? I came up with two metrics: in how many ways are the two concepts being compared similar, and how compelling are the ways in which they are dissimilar.

The first criterion is objective, and the second, which is subjective, is a measure of the weakness from which all comparisons suffer. After all, if

**G**od has covered all with His maya. He doesn’t let us know anything. Maya is ‘woman and gold’. He who puts maya aside to see God, can see Him.—*Gospel*, 260.



*Kite Chased by Crows*

there were no dissimilarities, we would not be making a comparison. Lest this last idea seem artificial, let me point out that perfectly identical things do exist in this world, at least according to modern science. For example, there is no way to compare two electrons or two protons or two atoms of the same element. We may find them in different circumstances, but in essence they are identical. According to quantum field theory, there is only one electron, for example, in this universe. Every electron is actually a particular excitation of an infinite background electron field. More relevant to this essay, Sri Ramakrishna is using comparisons to clarify the abstract spiritual laws in terms of the concrete world around us, so some dissimilarities will always be present.

One should also make a distinction between comparisons that are actually bad and those that we just don't like. The following illustration in the *Gospel* is one that irritated me for a long time, but that doesn't necessarily make it bad:

... Worldly duties bring much worry and anxiety along with them ... In a certain place the fishermen were catching fish. A kite swooped down and snatched a fish. At the sight of the fish, about a thousand crows chased the kite and made a great noise with their cawing. Whichever way the kite flew with the fish, the

crows followed it. ... As the kite began to fly about in confusion, lo, the fish dropped from its mouth. The crows at once let the kite alone and flew after the fish. Thus relieved of its worries, the kite sat on the branch of a tree and thought: 'That wretched fish was at the root of all my troubles. I have now got rid of it and therefore I am at peace' (314).

So the obvious question is, 'How much peace could the kite be experiencing while enduring the misery of an empty stomach?' Sri Ramakrishna goes on to explain: '... as long as a man has the fish, that is, worldly desires, he must perform actions and consequently suffer from worry, anxiety, and restlessness. No sooner does he renounce these desires than his activities fall away and he enjoys peace of soul' (ibid.).

Here the dissimilarity between the two outcomes, peace of soul and the peace of an empty stomach, is a compelling one—at least at a first glance—but upon further thought we may find it more similar than we're perhaps ready to admit. The kite had to give up something it wanted and needed. After this, it attained peace, but not worldly satiety. In our religious pursuits, especially at the beginning of spiritual life, we also have to give up things that we want—and think—we need. After some time, if we adhere to our practice with a dogged resolution, we find that we didn't need the things we thought we did, and that renouncing them has brought about some peace.

'But wait,' the attentive reader asks, 'Sri Ramakrishna says, "no sooner does he renounce ... than he enjoys peace of soul"' (ibid.). Yes, that's real renunciation, the kind that 'cuts the bondage of maya easily and at once' (410), but is that the kind we have? As Swami Saradananda says, we renounce lust and gold, but are 'pleased with whatever smells of them.'<sup>10</sup>

The reader may not be convinced, and a debate on the merits of this metaphor could easily take

up this essay and another, but I'd rather go on to one of my favourite of the Master's metaphors:

Japa means silently repeating God's name in solitude. ... Suppose there is a piece of timber sunk in the water of the Ganges and fastened with a chain to the bank. You proceed link by link, holding to the chain, and you dive into the water and follow the chain. Finally you are able to reach the timber. In the same way, by repeating God's name you become absorbed in Him and finally realize Him.<sup>11</sup>

Applying our metrics, there are a number of similarities we can draw from the illustration to our spiritual development. When the man starts out, he cannot see the timber. Similarly, at the beginning of our spiritual life, the goal is not in view, and we must have enough faith in the goal to persevere. The link-by-link progress given in the metaphor suggests a long and slow process. Going link-by-link, at times we might wonder if we're making any progress at all. In the same way, our spiritual life occasionally, perhaps frequently if we try to gauge it too often, seems to be progressing very slowly or not at all. But then, at some point, even though progress is slow, we hit the water. Something *happens*. There is a response from the other side. Grace descends. The water in the parable suggests that at this time in our spiritual growth, our world undergoes a complete transformation. For the reader who doubts the revolutionary nature of these kinds of experiences, I will quote St John of the Cross:

A single one of them may be sufficient to abolish at a stroke certain imperfections of which the soul during its whole life had vainly tried to rid itself, and to leave it adorned with virtues and loaded with supernatural gifts. A single one of these intoxicating consolations may reward it for all the labors undergone in its life—even were they numberless.<sup>12</sup>

At some point in our progress there is a

complete transformation of our character. Sri Ramakrishna's parable and St John of the Cross's quote suggest that it can be quite sudden and dramatic.

After this transformation we continue to proceed link-by-link *under water*. In other words, the complete transformation of our world and character does not necessarily mean an end to our journey. The Master's use of *water* suggests that a kind of acclimation to our new environment is required. The fact that we're now compelled to hold our breath to make further progress seems to symbolise the great strain on the body and brain that a real spiritual experience brings. Acclimation and further struggle in this new world now occur.

What about the second metric? How compelling are the dissimilarities between the metaphor and the concept it's being used to illustrate? The ways in which this journey do not resemble our spiritual practice are obviously only literal. A chain, some timber, a lake—even an idiot would know that these are not to be taken literally, and they are therefore not a distraction from the lessons being taught. The parable is short and simple, but perspicacious, pithy, and beautiful.

Another very consoling illustration is given by the Master in just a brief reference: 'There is also the instance of the wood-cutter who was a great lover of the Divine Mother. She appeared before him and showed him much grace and love; but he had to continue his profession of wood-cutting and earn his livelihood by that arduous work.'<sup>13</sup>

Here, the 'wood-cutter' is a metaphor for the devotee suffering through the drudgery of worldly life. No one's life goes just as he or

One attains the Absolute by going beyond the universe and its created beings conjured up by maya. By passing beyond the Nada one goes into samadhi. By repeating 'Om' one goes beyond the Nada and attains samadhi.


—Gospel, 263.



she wishes it all the time. Everyone has to ‘cut wood’ at some time or other. As mentioned in the Bhagavadgita,<sup>14</sup> this can lead to the world-weariness that brings people to God and makes devotees out of them. But when we pray to God, and He makes His presence known in our lives—either in dream, vision, in the depths of our meditation, or in the ‘still small voice’<sup>15</sup>—does He *explain* our situation to us? Well, to answer this question, we might ask ‘Did He *explain* the situation to the woodcutter?’ No.

Imagine we are the wood-cutter. We complain in our prayers about our sore back and aching muscles after a hard day’s work. Perhaps we wonder why we have to go about life in this way, and look to God for an answer. We have some experience, like the wood-cutter, where God shows us much love and then departs, but *He doesn’t answer the question*. He doesn’t give us twenty-five reasons *why* we are in the situation we are in.

And why not? Because if we somehow got the twenty-five reasons, we would want twenty-six. His answer to all the devotee’s questions is ‘I’m here and I love you.’ This is the answer we actually want. We think we want our questions answered: ‘Why did my boss fire me?’ ‘Why did my husband cheat on me?’ ‘Why is my life such a painful mess?’ What we actually want is the absence of any question at all. God’s answer satisfies the heart, and when the heart is satisfied, the mind will cease to grapple with questions and explanations, and end its wearisome wanderings. This end to the mind’s tortuous and torturous deliberations is what we all really yearn for, and when the heart is full, the mind can know some rest. Vedanta teaches that through practice, this

rest gradually leads to the complete cessation of the mind. It is said that the devotee then transcends the mind and all its limitations, and that this elimination of the mind is the culmination of all our spiritual practice and struggle. 

## Notes and References

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8. Patrick Robinson, *To the Death* (New York: ReadHowYouWant, 2010), 226.
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10. See Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2010), 507; for a trenchant portrait of the worldly man’s religion.
11. *Gospel*, 878–9.
12. See W James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 320. The book also contains many other beautiful mystical testimonies covering hundreds of years, mostly from the Christian tradition. The compiler of these experiences had the blessed good fortune of meeting Swami Vivekananda.
13. *Gospel*, 275–6.
14. Gita, 7.16.
15. 1 Kings 19:12.

**A** man gives his word and doesn’t take it back! ‘The words of a man are like the tusks of the elephant: they come out but do not go back.’ A man must be true to his word.  
—*Gospel*, 264.



# Vachanamritam: The Book that Transformed Kerala's Spiritual Realm

Swami Nandatmajananda

**G**URU NITYACHAITANYA YATI, the philosopher and multi-talented personality of Kerala, once opined that it was the *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamritam* that helped him tremendously not to deviate from the spiritual path during his voyage to different parts of the world. The Malayalam poet Kunhunni states that *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamritam* and *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* have inspired and changed the entire personality of

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Kuttikrishna Marar, the greatest critic of Malayalam who is best known for his study on Mahabharata called *Bharataparyatanam*. Marar once said that while going through the *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamritam* even for proofreading his throat was shaken with emotional push that often led to fill the eyes with devotion.<sup>1</sup> For all those who regard reading as a serious endeavour and for those who take reading only to substantiate their own authentic experiences, *Vachanamritam* has become a spiritual handbook. This sacred book, which has been described as 'concentrated Vedanta' by Swami Siddhinathananda, is being used for daily reading among the laity.



Kuttikrishna Marar (1900–73)

No spiritual orator in Kerala has ever completed his or her speech without mentioning *Vachanamritam*. Such was the inspiring potential of this great work.

The well-known Malayalam critic Prof. S Guptan Nair speaks about his own experiences: 'For me Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamritam is like any other holy book. It contains the observations of a jnani who could see the world as a great university. The significance of this work is that it reveals the spiritual domain of a people without being complicated by the intricacies of Vedanta and the arrogance of priestcraft. Vachanamritam is infused with the sweetness of sugar-candy and the medicinal qualities of honey' (327). Sukumar Azhikodu, the famous author of *Tattvamasi*, observes: 'Sri Ramakrishna's enlightened consciousness which is the embodiment of the spiritual knowledge imbued with the devotional serenity and not contaminated by the jargons of scholarship, is vividly seen in this translation also.' This reveals the authenticity and the influential potency of the one who transformed the

man like Kuttikrishna Marar. Sri Mahendranath Gupta aka M., the author of *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, the original title of *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamritam*, himself states that *Vachanamritam* is the way to immortality. This is the reason why, in his introduction to *Kathamrita*, M. has incorporated the following from the Bhagavata:

*Tava kathamritam taptajivanam kavibhiriditam kalmashapaham; shravanamangalam shrimadatatam bhuvi grinanti te bhurida janah;* the nectar of your words and the descriptions of your activities are the life and soul of those suffering in the material world. These narrations, transmitted by learned sages, eradicate one's sinful reactions and bestow good fortune upon whoever hears them. These narrations are broadcast all over the world and are filled with spiritual power. Certainly, those who spread this message are most munificent.<sup>2</sup>

It is very clear that M. has included the above verse out of his experiences, which were in fact a journey through an ocean of sorrows. Since this book contains different ways of liberation for householders it occupies the status of any holy book being used in daily life. Let us see the reasons behind this radical transformation in the social ethos of the people of Kerala. It would be untrue to say that there is no spiritual discourse or discussion which does not contain quotations from *Vachanamritam*. It is being regarded as equal to the Gita, the Bible, and the Quran not only by devotees but also by scholars. Since it contains in a lucid manner most of the things that a spiritual seeker needs to know it has been known as 'spiritual encyclopedia.' Like the Gita, it is the essence of all sciences. This all-inclusive domain wherein all sciences harmonise is the real cause why the voice of Sri Ramakrishna helped not only M. but also many others to flee from suicide and such harmful deeds.

It would not be out of place to explain the transformation penetrated into the consciousness of Kuttikrishna Marar. It was a great surprise



for all Malayalam readers that one who has written a book like *Bharataparyatanam* has turned from discursive thinking to spiritual quest.<sup>3</sup> But few have realised that the real cause behind this is the *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamritam* and *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. The whole story begins when Swami Trailokyananda contacted Marar in connection with the translation of Vivekananda literature. At that time Marar was the proofreader at *Mathrubhumi* Malayalam daily. He was reluctant to heed to the words of Trailokyananda in the early days of their meeting. But this intelligent critic, then turned into a staunch spokesman of Swamiji's literature. It was Swamiji who put Marar in the way of spirituality. He became a new man as soon as the translation of Swamiji's literature was completed. As C H Kunhappa writes: 'A totally different man familiar to me earlier, though he kept all cherished idiosyncrasies. Nevertheless, he seemed to be imbued with a new grace and serenity. Thenceforth, it could be stated that, Marar lived only for that spirituality.' On one occasion, Marar said to Kunhunni that *Bharataparyatanam* would not have been in the present form if it had been written today. The devotion towards Swamiji eventually led him to write a beautiful book on Swamiji entitled, *Bhagavadvivekanandan*. Like this, there are many who are being transformed by Swamiji's literature.

These two works that admit diversity in existence have a great potential to influence all the people of Kerala who live here without the constraints of caste and religion. Readers of different capacities and attitudes—scholars, spiritual seekers, and householders—are all attracted towards these to take advantage of the spiritual wealth. Sri Ramakrishna was the great soul who, with his fifty years of life, has shown us the five-thousand years of spiritual tradition and he was the living proof that one could 'see God face to face'<sup>4</sup> in this mundane life. There is no doubt

that the power of Ramakrishna literature to attract all kinds of people stems from his natural quality to dispel doubts, eliminate sufferings, and to discard the problems of life. Viewed from this perspective, everyone would admit along with Dr K V Puttappa aka Kuvempu, the noted literary figure in Kannada, that *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamritam* 'will form a religious constitution, a companion to our political constitution'.<sup>5</sup>

The ideas in all great works can be seen in the *Vachanamritam* since it sheds light on all aspects of science like the Gita. It is to be noted that this work contains many things which are not found in other books. That is to say, *Vachanamritam* discusses a number of topics that are not even mentioned in great books like the epic Mahabharata.<sup>6</sup> For instance, none of our traditional spiritual books contain the term *bhavamukha*. It is through the mouth of Sri Ramakrishna that the word *bhavamukha* appears in the world for the first time in history. Without understanding this word no one could understand the scientific import of reincarnation. Moreover, words like *vijnana*, *nitya*, *lila*, *bhava*, *mahabhava*, and *prema* assume deep philosophical connotations when used by Sri Ramakrishna.

It was Trailokyananda, who, after translating Swamiji's literature into Malayalam, instructed Swami Siddhinathananda to translate the Bengali *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* into Malayalam. It seems that Trailokyananda was born only to fulfill the task of translating *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* into Malayalam. The translation project was completed one month before the stipulated time.<sup>7</sup> Swami Trailokyananda

It is enough to believe that all is possible in God's creation. Never allow the thought to cross your mind that your ideas are the only true ones, and that those of others are false. Then God will explain everything.

—Gospel, 259.

passed away four days after the completion of the project. Few moments before his last breath, he said: 'My duty is fulfilled. Now, let me depart.' Siddhinathananda, the translator of *Vachanamritam*, also translated the sixth volume of *The Complete Works of Vivekananda* into Malayalam. Upon his request, Kuttikrishna Marar edited the *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamritam*.

There is an interesting story behind the birth of *Vachanamritam*. Mahendranath Gupta, during his forty-six years of life after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna in 1886, delivered a number of discourses based on the *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. He published his magnum opus *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* in Bengali in five volumes from 1892 to 1892. This classic work presented the authentic teachings of Sri Ramakrishna with the details of date, month, year, place, and context. For him the publication of *Kathamrita* was a spiritual practice. He insisted that the publishers should not print his name on any page of the *Kathamrita* and thus the publishers printed the author's name as 'M., a disciple of the Master'. This Bengali work was translated into English by Swami Nikhilananda and published in 1942 from the US. Its Indian edition was published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, in 1944. It has since been translated into many Indian languages like Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Gujarati, Punjabi, and Marathi. The foreword written by the Kannada writer Kuvempu to the Kannada translation of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, titled *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanaveda*, remains an excellent study of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

He writes:

We are indebted to two great souls for their attempt to disseminate the name and message of Sri Ramakrishna across the world. One is the world-renowned ascetic Swami Vivekananda; the other is known by the first letter of his name 'M' for his desire to remain unknown. While the first is as bright as the sun, the second occupies the status of being the light in the houses of all irrespective of poor-rich discriminations. And that was inevitable. His very presence was turned out to be a soothing light getting into the nooks and crannies of huts and palaces at the same time. He seemed to be a wild flower that hides among leaves but whose fragrance spread everywhere.

*Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamritam*, the Malayalam version of *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, was published in 1969. The word *katha* stands for history in Malayalam; conversation in Bengali; and thus, the original Bengali title *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* becomes *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamritam* in Malayalam. Siddhinathananda translated the Malayalam version directly from Bengali. As a result of this, the Malayalam version could retain the unique features of the primary source material including the background and colloquial expressions. The multilingual expertise and profound scholarship of the translator must have helped the work to become superb in the literary world as well. Siddhinathananda was a multitasking personality who is best known as a Vedantic scholar, orator, writer, translator, and interpreter of Sri Ramakrishna. For this reason, a student of Malayalam literature cannot ignore his




Sri 'M.'

works. His literary contributions include forty books in Malayalam and twelve books in English, such as the biography of Swami Vivekananda, *Studies on Ramayana*, *Bhagavadamritam*, *The Journey of An Ascetic: A Translation*, interpretation of *Manusmriti* and *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, *Vivekachudamani*, and *Ashtavakra Gita*.

Siddhinathananda himself states that the translation which began on 11 July 1962 at Thiruvananthapuram according to the instructions of Trailokyananda was completed on 5 April 1966.<sup>8</sup> It was the result of four years of constant effort by Siddhinathananda. Four writers rendered all the poems in the *Vachanamritam*. They are: V K Saraswathiyamma, Brahmachari Atmachaitanya, P Damodara Menon, and P C Vasudevan Ilayathu. Thus, Malayalam literature was enriched by *Vachanamritam* through the committed endeavour of Siddhinathananda. The recognition that the *Vachanamritam* achieved among Malayalam readers has already been mentioned. The world is being baptised in the flow of the nectar stemming from the peace of *Vachanamritam*. Aldous Huxley, one of the well-known thinkers of the West, has written in his Foreword to *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* that it is unique 'in the literature of hagiography'.<sup>9</sup> In the same vein, Swami Nikhilananda, the translator, observes in his Preface to the same work that it is 'the first book of its kind in the religious history of the world' since it is 'the record of the direct words of a prophet' (ix). We must also bear in mind the appraisal of Mahatma Gandhi that 'Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man, but they are pages from the Book of Life'.<sup>10</sup>

*Kathamrita* is the embodiment of Sri Ramakrishna himself and therefore the more we repeat from that work, the more does our taste for it develop, as the sages revealed to Suta in the Bhagavata: '*Vayam tu na vitrpyama uttamah-sh-lokavikrame, yachchhrinvatam rasajnanam svadu*

*svadu pade pade*; we never tire of hearing the transcendental pastimes of God, who is glorified by hymns. Those who have a taste for spiritual relationships with God relish hearing of his pastimes every moment.'<sup>11</sup>

There is no doubt that the reason behind the transmission of this great work to the heart of Malayalam readers is no less than the divine wish that the words of Sri Ramakrishna should be interfused with the entire world. 

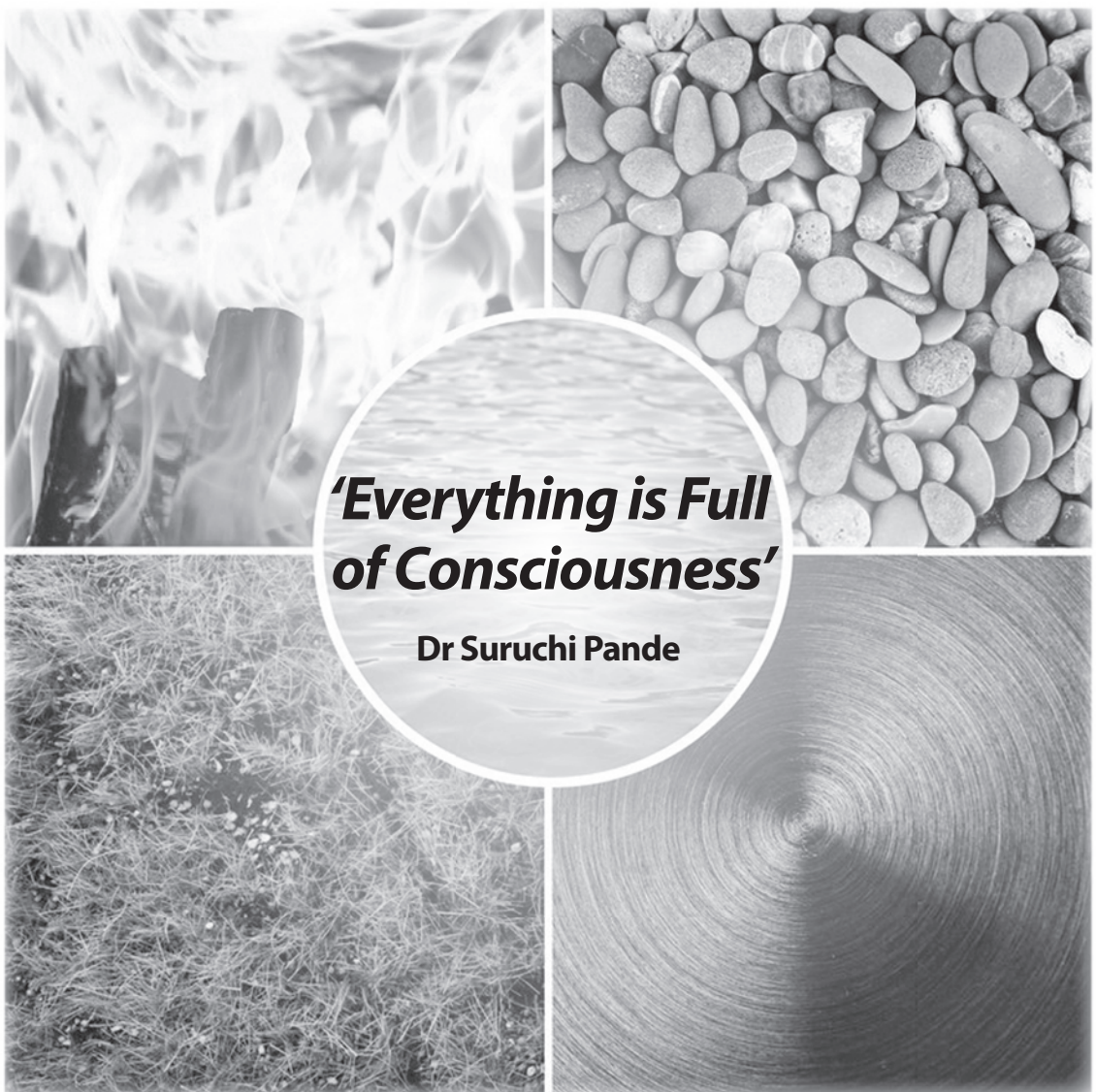
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2. Bhagavata, 10.31.9.
3. Marar's *Bharataparyatanam* is a critical study in Malayalam on the epic Mahabharata. It is in fact a psychological excursus into the ethical weaknesses of Pandavas. (See Kuttikrishna Marar, 'The Genesis of *Bharataparyatanam*', *Bharataparyatanam* (Malayalam) (Kozhikode: Marar Sahitya, Twenty-first Edition, 2001), 11).
4. Mahatma Gandhi in his Foreword to Swami Nikhilananda, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), ix.
5. Kuvempu, *A Homage to Gospel*, trans. Dr Prabhushankara (Mysuru: Ramakrishna Ashrama, 2004), 20.
6. It is said that the Mahabharata contains everything that is present in the world.
7. It was the result of many years of hard labour in collaboration with the erstwhile leading literary figures of Kerala.
8. See the "Foreword" to the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamritam*.
9. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 2002), v.
10. *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, ix.
11. Bhagavata, 1.1.19.

Some persons must perform selfless work a long time before they can practise dispassion and direct their minds to the spiritual ideal and at last be absorbed in God.

—Gospel, 267.





## ***'Everything is Full of Consciousness'***

**Dr Suruchi Pande**

**T**HESE DAYS WE FIND a great importance attached to the term 'environment' because human activities have so interfered in the natural world which is leading to pollution and extinction of a variety of flora and fauna. This has disturbed the sensitive minds, thinkers, and scientists all over the world. If we go back to the etymology of the word *environment*, we find that this English word was used by the well-known Scottish philosopher Carlyle (1795–1881) during

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1828 CE and it was the general translation of German word *umgebung* used by Goethe which meant 'area around something'.

The common Hindi or Marathi translation of the word environment is *paryaavarana*—the natural world. In ancient Indian tradition we may not find the word *paryaavarana* but we find the use of the terms *vyashti* and *samashti*. *Vyashti* means single—individual—existence and *samashti* means 'an aggregate which is considered as made up of each of which is consubstantially the same as the whole'. If a man deeply understands that he is just a part of this whole universe and dependent on nature, he will stop misusing and

mishandling of natural resources. *Vyashti* and *samashsti* both have a basis of the earth. In Sanskrit we have a word *prithvi* for the earth. The root verb is *prath* means to expand. Ancient Indian literature has given great respect to the earth. Earth is revered as one of the five gross elements. A sage Atharvana says in the Atharva Veda (12.1.15), ‘*tvaj-jaataastvayi charanti martyaastvam bibharshi dvipadastvam chatushpadah*—Born from thee, [O earth], mortals go about upon thee; thou bearest bipeds, thou quadrupeds.’<sup>1</sup>

Atharvana is full of praise for the earth and he says that the earth is full of nectar; she is infinite; for the one who looks at her without compassion, she will appear as full of stones and dust; but an enlightened person will understand her heart and she will also reveal her own real eternal nature to him. There is continuous cycle of days and nights but her heart is always full of eternal truths.

In human world every concept of development is anthropocentric. People think of social responsibilities in terms of helping their fellow beings; but they forget that their own existence is dependent on the health and conservation of the environment. We cannot even produce a tiny seed; but this Mother Earth is capable of producing food for all. How many people pause for a second to hear the humming of a honeybee; to appreciate her work capacity; to learn from nature? Can’t we think of the pains that a tree goes through when it is cut? Sri Ramakrishna preferred a particular horse carriage because the horses harnessed to it need not get directed by the fear of horsewhip. He used to tell his disciples that if the horses were beaten, he used to experience their pain. Once, when someone walked on the lawn roughly, he experienced the pain of the green grass in his chest. How many human beings have such rare sense of empathy? Very few saints have shown such wonderful correlation between universal self and individual

self. It is noted in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* that Sri Ramakrishna’s meditative state and visions became so intensive that he would experience the Divine Mother as sparkling even through trees. He said that she showed him that everything was full of consciousness.<sup>2</sup> We know how the *pancahvati*—the grove of five sacred trees—has played an important role in Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual life. He had even brought the *madhavi* creeper from Vrindavan and planted it in the *panchavati* (437). Thus the search for the true essence and meaning of human life begins with the earth. Everything is organically and vitally related to everything.

In this article I am going to link selected thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna with the protection and conservation of some basic environmental factors.

## Water

Sri Ramakrishna says: ‘She [the Divine Mother] would also immerse Her body in water in wintertime [when she practiced austere sadhana to obtain Siva as Her husband]’ (814).

‘It is said in the scriptures that water is a form of God’ (85).

‘He [sattvic devotee] worships God with mere Ganges water’ (322).

‘Sprinkle a little Ganges water on the mats. Many worldly people have sat on them’ (660).

## Water in our scriptures:

The *Taittiriya Aranyaka* (1.26.7) says, ‘*Napsu mutrapurishankuryat, na nishthivet, na vivasanas-snayat*’—One should not pass urine and faeces, should not spit and should not take bath with bare body in running water.

It is not good to harbour malice. The *Shaktas*, the *Vaishnavas*, and the *Vedantists* quarrel among themselves. That is not wise.  
—*Gospel*, 222.

*Aapa*, water, is termed as *jyoti*, light; *rasa*, the essence of life; and *amruta*, nectar of immortality; in our Vedic literature. The Rig Veda praises the wealth of water by considering it as a goddess named *Aapo Devi*. The *Chandogya Upanishad* elucidates a peculiar five-fold meditation or *Saama* worship. *Saama* is a metrical hymn. The Upanishad (2.3.1–2) says:

The fivefold *Sama* has to be meditated on as rain. The eastern wind, that is *Himkara* [a kind of low roar or sound like *him*]; the cloud form, that is *Prastava* [commencement of rains]; that it rains, that is *Udghita* [the chanting or it also means the *om*—the three syllable name of God]; that lightning flashes and thunder roars, that is *Pratihara* [striking back]; it (water) is used up, that is *Nidhana* [end or conclusion]. Anyone who, having known this thus, meditates on the five-fold *sama* as rain, for him does occur rain, and he causes rainfall.<sup>3</sup>

This worship is followed by another mode of five-fold meditation on water. It is again the song of the water cycle. The condensed black clouds are the *Himkara*; the water that is released through these clouds has its peculiar notes known as *Prastava*; the excellent, bubbling, and steady flow of water in the rivers proceeding towards the eastern direction is called *Udghita*; the water that flows towards the western direction is the *Pratihara*; and finally the water that merges into the ocean is the *Nidhana*.

This is how the beauty, serenity, and unavoidable importance of water are reflected and respected at a very subtle, philosophical, and sensitive level of thoughts. The sages experienced the inherent musical notes hidden in all natural phenomena. They appreciated the grace in creation and elegance in the cessation. Closure or end is not just a process of annihilation but it is making place for the new beginning by taking care of continuation of precious water cycle and to keep it unpolluted.

At the beginning of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*,<sup>4</sup> the sage offers his humble salutations to Varuna. He says, '*Sham varunah*—Let Varuna be auspicious (for us).' Varuna was considered to be one of the most respected deities in Vedic period. The word Varuna is derived from the root verb *vrū* means 'to cover, to surround.'

In the Rigveda the sages say that Varuna controls the forces of water; he puts on the cloth of water and due to him rivers flow in the direction of oceans. Thus Varuna is the one who 'encompasses the whole world.' Perhaps it was the personification of the sky. Varuna was also believed to be the deity of night. He was the deity of moral law. During day time he guards everything with the help of the Sun and during night he is attentive with the eyes of the moon and thousands of stars. These stars are said to be the spies of Varuna. He punishes those who transgress moral law and rules of good conduct. He activates *Vayu*—the lord of the wind and sustains life by giving rain and crops.

In the Puranic period, Varuna was believed to be the lord of oceans, water, and aquatic animals. In some temples, Varuna is depicted as riding on a crocodile or sometimes he is depicted as riding a chariot drawn by seven swans.

There is a great symbolism behind the concept of Varuna. We can think of him as our conscience which is always present in our mind and intellect but we tend to neglect it. The world has progressed rapidly due to modern technology but the tree of life that has branched widely does not have deep rooting. Thus Varuna is an image of positive energies that we have to accumulate till the end. That is the 'encompassing existence' of Varuna in Nature and in human life.

Those who are acquainted with the life of Sri Ramakrishna know how he revered the River Ganga.

In India Rivers have a cultural, spiritual,



geographical aspects and a peculiar place in literature as well in life of people. Rivers were revered along with their biodiversity. Ancient seers in the Vedic times offered prayers to rivers and praised water by saying:

Let the rivers and streams recreate honey for us.<sup>5</sup>  
Earth with the incessant attendance of flowing waters was venerated.<sup>6</sup>

An important message to restrict water pollution was given:

Do not harm the water because it has medicinal values.<sup>7</sup>

In the *Chhandogya Parishishta*, a river was defined as the flow of waters which is longer than the length of eight thousand cows:

To maintain the cleanliness and serenity of rivers, they are honoured as goddesses in our culture. Traditionally Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu, and Kaveri are highly revered as holy rivers. Rivers represent feminine aspects of deities. Sarasvati is the symbol of auspicious waters and also as the perpetual flow of pure knowledge. The Puranas are full of praises for rivers.

Etymologically Ganga is the ‘one who leads us to the feet of God’. A reference to the river Narmada as *Namade* by Ptolemy is found in second century CE. *Narmada* means ‘the one who gives joy’. She is also called *Reva*. The word *Reva* is derived from the Sanskrit root *rev* meaning leaping motions. It refers to the water of the river *Narmada* which flows blissfully as also through rocky patches.

If we take a look at various Sanskrit *stotras*—the verses written to celebrate rivers, we come across references to their rich bio-diversity. Rivers are treated as protectors of not only human beings but also of all flora and fauna residing in her and near her. Particular fauna is correlated to river deities as their carrier vehicles. The River Yamuna is believed to be seated on



Swami Vivekananda Carried Ganga Water from Calcutta

tortoise; rivers Ganga and Narmada ride on a crocodile. The gharial has a reference to river Ganga in its Latin name *Gavialis gangeticus*. It is interesting to note that the word *gangeticus* means ‘of the Ganga’ and ‘*gavialis*’ is a derivation of the Hindi word ‘gharial’—the one which has a *ghara*, pot—a bulbous blob on the nostrils of mature males, an organ used as an amplifier of buzzing sounds. Here, a great symbology is cloistered.

A crocodile is the symbol of worldly desires. A deity which is a personified form of pure thoughts and energies rides on it to gain ethical control over the basic instincts of man. Secondly, crocodiles

One must accept the forms of God. Do you know the meaning of the image of Jagaddhatri? She is the Bearer of the Universe. ... The Divine Mother, Jagaddhatri, reveals Herself in the heart of one who can control the mind, which may be compared to an elephant.

—Gospel, 270.

are the protectors and guardians of the temple of waters. The second verse of the *Narmadashtakam Stotra* composed by Adi Shankaracharya, says that the river *Narmada* confers happiness on many fishes, tortoises, crocodiles, geese, and ruddy Shelducks that dwell in her water. If we start analyzing the aquatic biodiversity of *Narmada*, we note that this river has eighty-four species of fishes, it is adorned by the Indian star tortoise, seventy-six species of mammals, two hundred and seventy-six species of birds, fossils and sediments, and researchers have also claimed that the Narmada valley at one time was a home to hippos and elephants. Nectar of life flows through rivers. Many of our rivers are breathing their last because of man-made pollution. The life of a river is linked with the life of humanity.

### Honeybees

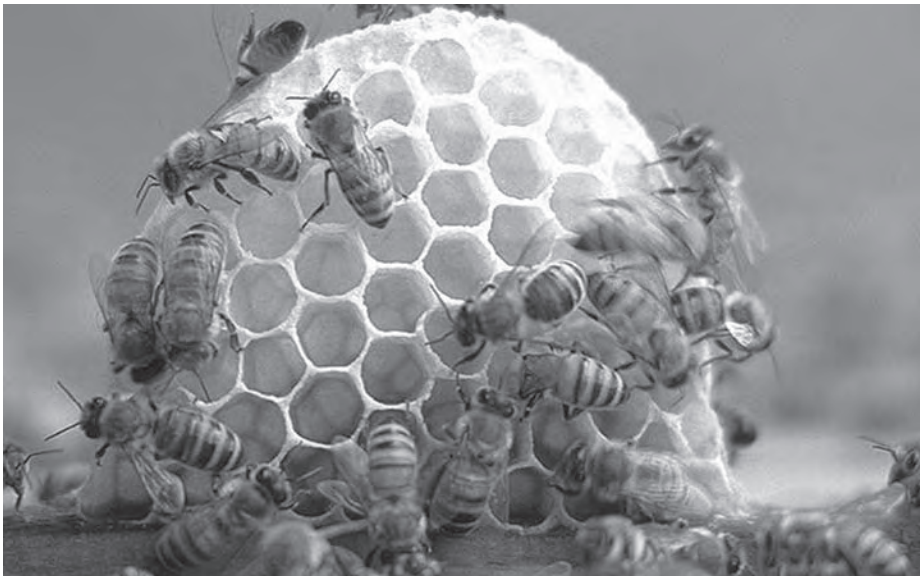
Sri Ramakrishna says: 'A bee lights on flowers and on nothing else'.<sup>8</sup> 'With great labour the bees build a hive; but a man breaks it and takes the honey away' (874).

Most of the times a reference is made to honey bees metaphorically to suggest industrious

nature and a merit of hard work. Indian culture and literature have taken note of honey bees from ancient times. We come across beautiful references to honeybees right from the Vedic times. One of the sages in the Rig Veda prays that the whole world should become sweet like honey. He says,

Let every wind that blows drop honey,  
Let the rivers and streams  
recreate honey,  
Let all our medicines turn into honey,  
Let the dawn and evening be full of honey,  
Let the darkness be converted into honey,  
Let our nourisher, the sky above,  
be full of honey,  
Let our trees be honey,  
Let the sun be honey,  
Let the cows make honey.<sup>9</sup>

Texts like the Vedas, the Buddhist literature, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata refer to the honey bees. The *madhu-vidya*—the honey doctrine of the Vedic and Upanishadic period refers to the concentrated knowledge of Supreme Bliss. The *Chhandogya Upanishad* begins speaks about the *Madhu Vidya* by stating that the Sun is verily honey to the divine beings and the heaven is



like the cross-beam, the intermediate region is the beehive.<sup>10</sup> The correspondence and interrelationships between the elements of the external world and the individual beings are analogous to those existing between the honey and the bees.

A rock painting depicting honey bees, a honeycomb, and a human figure attempting to get honey is found in Pachmarhi, Central India. It belongs to Neolithic period and dates back to 10,200 BCE.

## Trees

Trees are the poetry of Gods. In Indian philosophical context, the universe and the absolute Brahman are compared with the tree; various trees are believed to be the abodes of gods and goddesses; a tree is compared to life.

Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Without His [God's] will not even a leaf can move.'<sup>11</sup> 'Go to the Panchavati and meditate there under the banyan-tree' (124). 'Under the banyan-tree I saw Him [God] coming from the Ganges' (830). 'When I meditated under the bel-tree I used to see various visions clearly' (378). 'I practised the discipline of the Tantra under the bel-tree. At that time I could see no distinction between the sacred tulsi and any other plant' (544). 'Under the bel-tree I had many flaming visions. There I practised the various sadhanas prescribed in the Tantra' (814). 'One shouldn't forcibly tear off the green branch of a coconut tree. That injures the tree' (487). 'By looking at trees a man awakens in his heart the picture of a hermitage in which a rishi is practising austerity' (606). '... there will be no need for you to worry and fear if you make your mind as strong as a thick tree-trunk' (327). 'You may cut a peepal-tree to the ground and think it is dead to its very root, but the next morning you will find a new sprout shooting up from the dead stump' (172).

Indian culture has venerated trees. Most of the Indian festivals are connected with trees. Trees are respected in religious contexts. Indian

mythology also contains unique stories about the origin of trees.

We do find references to the tress like Bel, Peepal, Banyan, Kadamba in Sri Ramakrishna's words. From ethno-botanical point of view, a lot can be said about each individual tree but here we have to restrict to the fundamental view of Sri Ramakrishna when he says that trees remind us of the meditating sages or not to cut the green branch. A beautiful and enlightening book titled *The hidden life of trees* by Peter Wohlleben is written to explain how trees feel, how they communicate. The author says that the trees use scent for their communication. Trees protect themselves and their fellow trees by sending scent messages. He has given an interesting example:

Four decades ago, scientists noticed something on the African savannah. The giraffes there were feeding on umbrella thorn acacias, and the trees didn't like this one bit. It took the acacias mere minutes to start pumping toxic substances into their leaves to rid themselves of the large herbivores. The giraffes got the message and moved on to other trees in the vicinity. But did they move on to trees close by? No, for the time being, they walked right by a few trees and resumed their meal only when they had moved about 100 yards away

The reason for this behavior is astonishing. The acacia trees that were being eaten gave off a warning gas (specifically, ethylene) that signaled to neighboring trees of the same species that a crisis was at hand. Right away, all the forewarned trees also pumped toxins into their leaves to prepare themselves.<sup>12</sup>

This amazing book also helped me to understand the depth of ancient Indian concept of *vanaprasthashrama* in a different aspect.


**T**he truth is that one must reap the result of the prarabdha karma. The body remains as long as the results of past actions do not completely wear away.—*Gospel*, 276.



*Vanaprastha* means retiring into the forest to learn withdrawal with a joyful mind. Why was retiring into the forest suggested? Because forest air is perfect healthy. Trees are huge air filters. An experiment by Korean scientists is elaborately discussed by the above mentioned author. The scientists were tracking elderly women as they walked through forests and urban areas. It was observed that ‘when the women were walking in the forest, their blood pressure, lung capacity and elasticity of their arteries improved, whereas an excursion through the town showed none of these changes’ (223). The Phytoncides have favourable results on the health of a tree and humans. Phytoncides are defined as the antimicrobial allelochemic volatile organic compounds derived from plants. Such healthy air is beneficial in old age when we start losing effectiveness of our immune system.

Trees and plants do respond to external stimuli and they react in a different way when a branch of a tree is cut. It is like a shock to the tree. Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858–1937) demonstrated an experiment on how plants react and in modern times. Scientists like Dr Suzanne Simard have done a fantastic research on this concept. Peter Wohlleben says in his concluding remarks: ‘We shouldn’t be concerned about trees purely for material reasons; we should also care about them because of the little puzzles and wonders they

present us with. Here is the last remaining piece of nature, right on our doorstep, where adventures are to be experienced and secrets discovered. And who knows, perhaps one day the language of trees will eventually be deciphered, giving us the raw material for further amazing stories’ (245).

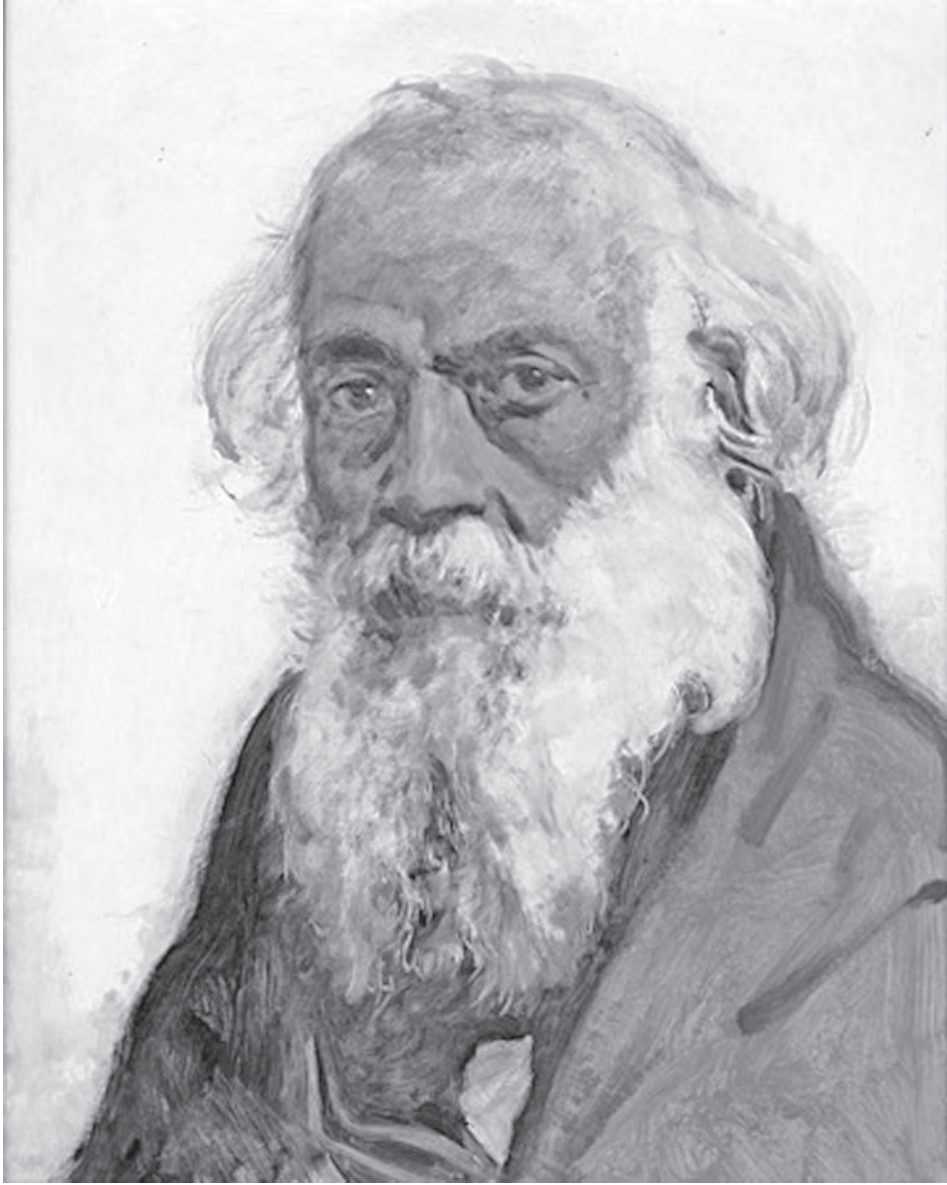
Thus the whole earth is reverberating with life principle about which Sri Ramakrishna says that everything is full of consciousness. 

## References

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10. *Chhandogya Upanishad*, 3.1.1.
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Panchavati at Daksineswar





## ***The Genius of Parable and Metaphor***

**Edith Tipple**

**I** SPENT MY CHILDHOOD in a Christian church. Every Sunday morning we children went to Sunday School while our parents

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went to the church service. As a young child I dreaded a boring hour of colouring shepherds and camels carrying wise men bearing gifts across a barren dessert to the baby Jesus who had just been born in a manger. The most penetrating teaching under age twelve was the song at the end of each Sunday school: 'Jesus loves me; that

I know; for the Bible tells me so.’<sup>1</sup> But a book, the Bible, was not good enough for me: I wanted to know what Jesus himself told me.

At last, as a teen, we were given Jesus’ teachings, mostly in the form of parables. Those parables could not be forgotten, for the very genius of parables, and metaphors to a lesser extent, is to engage the mind, together with the senses, to create a binding similitude. Thus, to imagine casting a seed on rock, or among thorns that choke it, or on moist tilled ground all necessitate images that involve both sight and touch, even smell—impregnable hard surfaces, compacted thorns, and soft, welcoming loam. It is only in prepared soil that the seed will sprout.

In one of Jesus’ parables, the seed was grain that a farmer was sowing. The seed, Jesus said, was the word of God. When it falls on some, it is received with joy, but, having no roots, it is soon forgotten. The seed that falls in thorns is overcome with the nettles of cares and pleasures of life, so it never ripens. But the seed falling on good ground falls on honest and good hearts that bring forth fruit with patience. Take care, he continued, how you listen, for to him who has understanding, more shall be given.

For one so intrigued by the use of parable and metaphor as a teaching method, imagine my overwhelming joy to find *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Not only were there examples by the dozen, but their depth and breadth were all-inclusive of every aspect of life and spiritual practice.

The history of how Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings were given to us is quite interesting. Mahendra Nath Gupta—Master Mahashay, or simply M.—was his principle chronicler. In the Introduction to *The Condensed Gospel* we find: ‘As

Swami Shivananda, a direct disciple of the Master and the second president of the Ramakrishna Math, has remarked: “Whenever there was an interesting talk, the Master drew his [M.’s] attention to the holy words spoken. We did not then know why the Master did so. Now we can realize that this action of the Master had an important significance; for it was reserved for Master Mahashay to give to the world at large the sayings of the Master.”<sup>2</sup>

M. first wrote two pamphlets, both in English, in October and November of 1897, both titled *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. They were published together in book form by the Brahnavadin office, Madras in 1907. When Swami Vivekananda had first read the two pamphlets, he encouraged M. to write a more thorough documentary, using his comprehensive diaries for the task. M. consequently began the *Kathamrita* in Bengali, a work in five volumes, the first published in 1902, the following four volumes in 1905, 1907, 1910 and 1932. As a matter of fact, he was working on reading the dummy of Volume Five when he passed away.

To return to the two pamphlets published as an English book in 1907, four years later, in 1911, the Ramakrishna Math in Madras wished to publish a second edition. M. himself revised it, removing the Biblical English—‘sayest’ for says, ‘thou’ for you—and titled it *The Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. It is the closest to M.’s writing that those who do not know Bengali can find. It is an independent work, in English, and it is a fresh and fluid story that speaks simply, one paragraph and metaphor after another illustrating the same point. In one section titled ‘The Ego of Divine Love and Problem of Life,’ he writes:

Self or ego leads away from the Lord, but the ego of divine love—the ego of Godward knowledge—the ego of the child, leads to God.

**T**he real cleverness is the cleverness by which one realizes God. That trick is the best of all tricks.

—*Gospel*, 284.



Sankaracharya retained after *Samadhi* the ego of Godward knowledge for the purpose of teaching mankind.

The self or ego of the child is not attached to things of this world. The child gets out of temper but soon there is not a trace of anger left in him. He builds a play-house for the dogs, but presently forgets all about this. His fondness for his playmates knows no bounds; but if he loses sight of them for some time, he forms new ties and forgets all about the old friends. The self of the child is thus unattached to anything. The self of divine love kept after *Samadhi*, in which it becomes one with the Absolute, solves the problem of life (226).

On the other hand, Swami in Nikhilananda's 1942 English translation of the five-volume *Kathamrita*, we find a child of five years old:

After realizing God a man becomes like a child five years old. The ego of such a man may be called the 'ego of a child,' the 'ripe ego'. The child is not under the control of any of the gunas ...

One moment he quarrels with his chum or even fights with him, and the next moment he hugs him, shows him much affection, and plays with him again. He is not even under the control of rajas. Now he builds his play house and makes all kinds of plans to make it beautiful, and the next moment he leaves everything behind and runs to his mother. Again, you see him wearing a beautiful piece of cloth worth five rupees. After a few moments the cloth lies on the ground; he forgets all about it. Or he may carry it under his arm. If you say to the child: 'That's a beautiful piece of cloth. Whose is it?', he answers: 'Why, it is mine. My daddy gave it to me.' You may say, 'My darling, won't you give it to me?' and he will reply: 'Oh no, it is mine. My daddy gave it to me. I won't give it to you.' Some minutes later you may coax him with a toy or a music-box worth a penny, and he will give you the cloth. Again, a child five years old is not attached even to sattva. You may find him today very fond of his playmates in the neighbourhood; he doesn't feel happy for a moment

Swami Nikhilananda at Thousand Island Park in the Study used by Swami Vivekananda



without seeing them; but tomorrow, when he goes to another place with his parents, he finds new playmates; all his love is now directed to his new friends, and he almost forgets about his old ones. Further, a child has no pride of caste or family. If his mother says to him about a certain person, 'This man is your elder brother', he believes this to be one hundred per cent true. One of the two may have been born in a brahmin family and the other may belong to a low caste, say that of the blacksmiths, but they will take their meal from the same plate. A child is beyond all ideas of purity and impurity. He is not bound by social conventions. He doesn't hesitate to come out naked before others.<sup>3</sup>

When a man has true knowledge, he feels that everything is filled with Consciousness (568).

In 1907 Swami Abhedananda at the Vedanta Society in New York published *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, in which Preface he said, '... I have edited and remodeled the larger portion of [M's] English manuscript; while the remaining portions I have translated directly from the Bengali edition of his notes ...' He states that M. requested him to do so. This *Gospel* stands alone, also using Biblical English, its having been taken from M.'s 1907 book—the publication of the two pamphlets together—and not his edited and modernised English 1911 edition. It is unusual in that Abhedananda used the word 'lust' rather than 'woman' in translating *kamini-kanchana*.

In 1912 the San Francisco Vedanta Center, the Hindu Temple, published the 1907 book

word for word, Biblical English included, but instead of translating *kamini-kanchana* as 'woman and gold', it translated 'lust and gold'. To quote Gauri Ma in this connection: "The common man knows that the essence of the Master's advice is: Give up women and gold. This induces a belief in many that he used to look down upon women. This is an erroneous idea. ... the Master has uttered this note of warning, against gold and sensuality, against a life of enjoyment, but surely not against women. Just as he advised the ascetic-minded men to guard themselves against women's charms, so also did he caution pious women against men's company."<sup>4</sup>

As mentioned above, Swami Nikhilananda's translation was published in 1942. It put all five volumes into one book, arranging the material chronologically. In it, he used the term 'woman and gold' instead of 'lust and greed'. This is unfortunate, for there are few Westerners who understand Bengali and thus the word *kamini-kanchana*. Considerable misunderstanding of Sri Ramakrishna, and also irritation, has been the result. Unfortunately, M. also used the term 'woman and gold' in his 1911 *Condensed Gospel*. Perhaps Nikhilananda did not want to naysay M. himself.

In 2001 Sachindra Kumar Majumdar translated the *Kathamrita* word for word. It had a limited printing, but is now available in digital CD from Vedanta Press. It is highly appreciated by the few who have read it. Majumdar was a monastic disciple of the beloved and highly respected Swami Shivananda, Sri Ramakrishna's disciple who became second president of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission after Swami Brahmananda. He served as Swami Nikhilananda's assistant for a short time, then left the Order and taught yoga independently.

Recently Sri Ma Trust of Chandigarh, India published a five-volume translation of

**T**he other day I went to Calcutta. As I drove along the streets in the carriage, I observed that everyone's attention was fixed on low things. Everyone was brooding over his stomach and running after nothing but food. Everyone's mind was turned to 'woman and gold'. I saw only one or two with their attention fixed on higher things, with their minds turned to God. —*Gospel*, 281.

the *Kathamrita* by Dharm Pal Gupta that is as faithful to the original word as possible. Second editions of these volumes have been edited for better English, but only Volume I of the edited five volumes has been published. The remaining four volumes should be available by 2019.

Some years ago I did an in-depth study of Sri Ramakrishna's parables and metaphors from Nikhilananda's 1942 translation, as yet unpublished, referencing each to the subject he was discussing. It includes two sections: 1) an index to subjects, and 2) the parable, metaphor, or example written out; it includes the subject he was

referencing. Consequently, it can be discerned easily what subjects he stressed in his teaching. Interestingly, knowledge, and realization are the most delineated subjects, followed by renunciation, mind, and then by love.

To return to Jesus' parable of sowing seeds regarding who can assimilate spiritual ideas, Sri Ramakrishna also used three images. He mentioned that some of the visitors who came with devotees stayed only a few minutes, whispering to his friend that he would wait outside. Sri Ramakrishna's words had fallen on rock. Concerning the seed fallen in thorns, he used the

*Swami Abhedananda*





image of a jar with a small leak. 'If one keeps water in a leaky jar, the water escapes little by little through the leak.'<sup>5</sup>

But with regard to the seed fallen on prepared soil, Sri Ramakrishna used the image of a photographic plate: 'The image that falls on a photographic plate covered with black film is retained. ... As the object moves away, the glass becomes the same as it was before. [rock]' (173) 'A real devotee develops the power of assimilating instruction. [prepared soil] An image cannot be impressed on bare glass, but only on glass stained with a black solution, as in photography' (244).

As Jesus proclaimed, 'Suffer little children to come unto me, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,'<sup>6</sup> Sri Ramakrishna expounded on the simplicity of a child in telling of a four or five year old child named Shibu whom he knew in Kamarpukur ... 'When the clouds rumbled and lightning flashed, Shibu would say to me: "There, uncle! They're striking matches again!" (All laugh.) One day I noticed him chasing grasshoppers by himself. The leaves rustled in the nearby trees. "Hush! Hush!" he said to the leaves, "I want to catch the grasshoppers." He was a child and saw everything throbbing with consciousness. One cannot realize God [the kingdom of heaven] without the faith that knows no guile, the simple faith of a child' (568).

Sri Ramakrishna's experiences themselves were examples for some teachings. On compassion for all living beings, we remember the day that he was gazing at the Ganges and saw a boatman beating another. Stripes appeared on his own back. And he could not walk on grass for fear of hurting

the consciousness in the grass: 'have realized that Brahman and Sakti are identical ... Brahman dwells in all beings as the Bibhu, the All-pervasive Consciousness, though Its manifestation is greater in some places than in others' (550).

As we know, Sri Ramakrishna used the same example to illustrate different ideas. For instance, 'Bee Buzzing' illustrates, at different times, subjects as diverse as worship, reason, realization, silence, teacher, vision, duty, and scriptures. In answer to the question, 'Must one perform formal worship forever?' he answered, 'How long does a bee buzz about? As long as it hasn't lighted on a flower. While sipping honey it doesn't buzz' (785).

'Bee Buzzing' with regard to reason: 'After the vision of Brahman a man becomes silent. He reasons about It as long as he has not realized It' (103).

On duty and samadhi: 'With the realization of Satchidananda one goes into samadhi. Then duties drop away. ... But it will not do for the sadhaka to renounce duties. He should perform his duties, ... If you see someone engaged in reasoning even after he has realized God, you may liken him to a bee, which also buzzes a little even while sipping honey from a flower' (111).

On scriptures: 'How long should one reason about the texts of the scriptures? So long as one does not have direct realization of God' (476). 'If a man but once tastes the joy of God, his desire to argue takes wing. ... What will you achieve by quoting from books?' (844)

A 'bel-fruit' illustrates not only the Absolute, discrimination, renunciation, and realization, but I-consciousness and meditation.

As long as one has not realized God, one should renounce the world, following the process of 'Neti, neti'. But he who has attained God knows that it is God who has become all this. Then he sees that God, maya, living beings, and the universe form one whole. God includes the universe and its living beings. ... Suppose you have

**A** true devotee of God does not care for such things as wealth or health. He thinks: 'Why should I practise spiritual austerities for creature comforts, money, or name and fame? These are all impermanent. They last only a day or two.'

—*Gospel*, 286.



IMAGE: AMITABHA BOSE

separated the shell, flesh, and seeds of a bel-fruit and someone asks you the weight of the fruit. Will you leave aside the shell and the seeds, and weigh only the flesh? Not at all. To know the real weight of the fruit, you must weigh the whole of it—the shell, the flesh, and the seeds. ... The shell may be likened to the universe, and the seeds to living beings. While one is engaged in discrimination one says to oneself that the universe and the living beings are non-Self and unsubstantial. At that time one thinks of the flesh alone as the substance, and the shell and seeds as unsubstantial. But after discrimination

is over, one feels that all three parts of the fruit together form a unity. Then one further realizes that the stuff that has produced the flesh of the fruit has also produced the shell and seeds. To know the real nature of the bel-fruit one must know all three (327–8).

Using 'Bel-fruit' as an example of Qualified Non-dualism: '[According to Qualified Non-dualism,] Brahman or the Absolute is qualified by the universe and its living beings. These three—Brahman, the world, and living beings—together constitute One. ... At first it appears

that the real thing in the fruit is the flesh, and not its seeds or shell. Then by reasoning you find that the shell, seeds, and flesh all belong to the fruit; the shell and seeds belong to the same thing that the flesh belongs to' (733).

On I-consciousness: 'It is not possible to rid oneself of "I-consciousness". And as long as one is aware of this "I-consciousness", one cannot speak of the universe and its living beings as unreal' (802).

On the Relative vs. Brahman: 'There is another view, according to which God has become all that you see. ... That which is the Absolute has also its relative aspect, and that which is the Relative has also its absolute aspect. You cannot set aside the Absolute and understand just the Relative. And it is only because there is the Relative that you can transcend it step by step and reach the Absolute' (851).

It is interesting to try to boil down the great incarnations' teachings to one distinguishing idea. For instance, we remember Ramana Maharshi by 'Who Am I?'; Nisargadatta, 'Thou Art That'; Jesus, 'The Sermon on the Mount', especially 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'<sup>7</sup>, because Swami Vivekananda said, 'This sentence alone would save mankind, if all books and prophets were lost'<sup>8</sup>; Buddha, 'There is suffering, and there is a way out of suffering'; and the Hebrew Bible 'I Am that I Am.'<sup>9</sup> But when we come to Sri Ramakrishna, his teachings

are so vast that all we can think is: to realise God is the goal of life, and it necessitates renunciation of all else. According to him, any path will take you to the highest Ideal if followed with the utmost sincerity. As Swami Prabhavananda, who founded the Vedanta Society of Southern California, paraphrased Sri Ramakrishna's teaching, 'Realize God any way that appeals to you—by hook or by crook.'

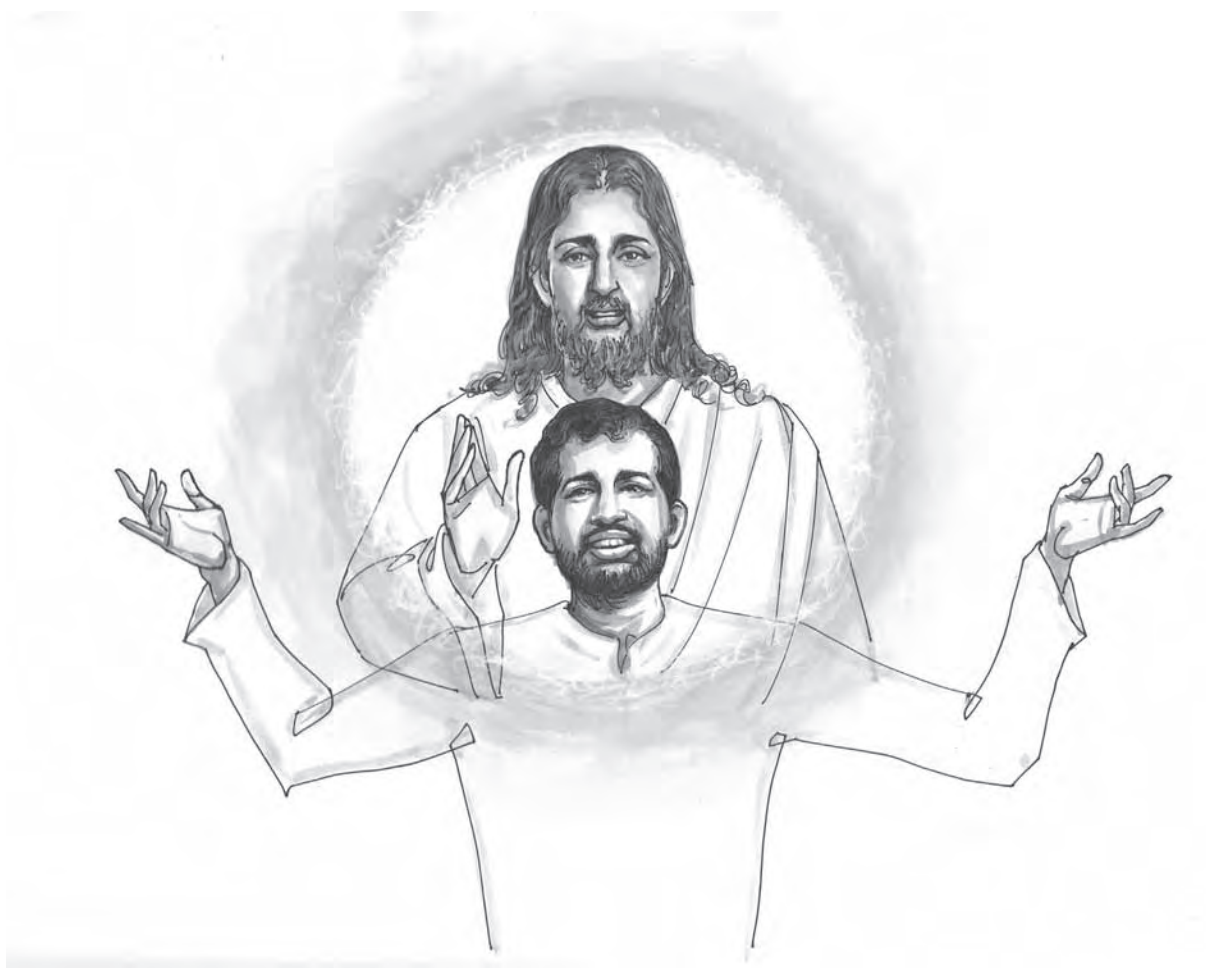


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  4. *Gauri Mata* (Calcutta: Saradeshvari Ashrama, 1944) and Swami Tyagananda and Pravrajika Vrajaprana, *Interpreting Ramakrishna: Kālī's Child Revisited* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2010), 257.
  5. *Gospel*, 414.
  6. Matthew, 19.14.
  7. Matthew, 5.8.
- 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.  
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.  
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God,  
Blessed are they who are persecuted, for righteousness'sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'
8. Thousand Island Park, 6 August 1895, in Swami Vivekananda, *Inspired Talks* (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1921), 209;
  9. Exodus, 3.14.

**T**he sage Vasishtha was stricken with grief at the death of his hundred sons. Asked by Lakshmana why a man of knowledge should grieve for such a reason, Rama said, 'Brother, go beyond both knowledge and ignorance.' He who has knowledge has ignorance also. If a thorn has entered your foot, get another thorn and with its help take out the first; then throw away the second also. —*Gospel*, 287-8.





## ***Ramakrishna, Christ, and the Paradox of Grace***

**Steven F Walker**

ONE OF THE WAYS the teachings of Ramakrishna and of Christ are similar is when it comes to the paradox of grace. 'Grace' may be defined as referring to spiritual enlightenment as something spontaneously given by God or the teacher; it is neither earned nor deserved by the devotee or the disciple. This

idea of grace by no means constitutes the whole of Ramakrishna's and Christ's teachings, which frequently encourage spiritual aspirants to struggle hard and, as in Buddha's last words, to 'work out [their] salvation with diligence.'<sup>1</sup> But the paradox of grace does correspond to an important common dimension of their teachings, however differently expressed.

The following story or parable illustrates vividly one of the important things Ramakrishna

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had to say about 'grace'.

Once a tigress attacked a flock of goats. As she sprang on her prey, she gave birth to a cub and died. The cub grew up in the company of the goats. The goats ate grass and the cub followed their example. They bleated; the cub bleated too. Gradually it grew to be a big tiger. One day another tiger attacked the same flock. It was amazed to see the grass-eating tiger. Running after it, the wild tiger at last seized it, whereupon the grass-eating tiger began to bleat. The wild tiger dragged it to the water and said: 'Look at your face in the water. It is just like mine. Here is a little meat. Eat it.' Saying this, it thrust some meat into its mouth. But the grass-eating tiger would not swallow it and began to bleat again. Gradually, however, it got the taste for blood and came to relish the meat. Then the wild tiger said: 'Now you see there is no difference between you and me. Come along and follow me into the forest.'<sup>2</sup>

Entertaining as the story is, it is clearly incomplete, for one senses that it, like so many of



Christ's parables, contains a meaning that may not be immediately obvious to the listener. So Ramakrishna, as Christ did frequently, goes on to give a few words of explanation:

'So there can be no fear if the guru's grace descends on one. He will let you know who you are and what your real nature is. If the devotee practices spiritual discipline a little, the guru explains everything to him. Then the disciple understands for himself what is real and what is unreal. God alone is real, and the world is illusory' (ibid.).

A good example of this descent of the guru's grace is to be found in a scene, on Monday, 24 December 1883, in which the householder devotee Surendra asks Ramakrishna:

Surendra: 'Sir, why can't I meditate?'

Master: 'You remember God and think of Him, don't you?'

Surendra: 'Yes, sir. I go to sleep repeating the word "Mother"' (362).

However sincere and devoted Surendra may have been, this does not sound as if he were doing very much in the way of spiritual practice! But Ramakrishna, rather than urging him to do more, says instead:

Master: 'That is very good. It will be enough if you remember God and think of him' (ibid.).

At this point M comments: 'Sri Ramakrishna had taken Surendra's responsibilities on himself. Why should Surendra worry about anything?' (ibid.) But, although the guru's grace had already descended upon Surendra, Ramakrishna still asks him to 'practice spiritual discipline a little.'

Later that day Ramakrishna returns to his earlier train of

thought—that a little bit of effort is still required of the disciple, even after the grace of the guru has descended. He presents two brief but vivid parables as illustrations:

The guru no doubt does everything for the disciple; but at the end he makes the disciple work a little himself. When cutting down a big tree, a man cuts almost through the trunk; then he stands aside for a moment, and the tree falls down with a crash.

The farmer brings water to his field through a canal from the river. He stands aside when only a little digging remains to be done to connect the field with the water. Then the earth becomes soaked and falls of itself, and the water of the river pours into the canal in torrents (363).

Like Ramakrishna, Christ frequently taught the crowds who gathered to see him using parables, to the point where the *Gospel* of Matthew even asserts that ‘he spoke to them only in parables.’<sup>3</sup> One of the most famous of these stories is the Parable of the Lost Sheep: ‘What would you do if you had 100 sheep and one of them wandered off? Wouldn’t you leave the 99 on the hillside and go look for the one that had wandered away? I am sure that finding it would make you happier than having the 99 that never wandered off’ (18:10–4).

He then gives the explanation of the message of the parable: ‘That’s how it is with your Father in heaven. He doesn’t want any of these little ones to be lost’ (ibid.). Both Ramakrishna’s parable of the grass-eating tiger and Christ’s parable of the lost sheep use an animal in order to illustrate the paradox of grace: it does not depend on spiritual merit or on any special qualification. Both the tiger-sheep and the lost sheep are in a predicament, and desperately need help. ‘Grace’ is the name of that help, and it is inspired solely by concern for their welfare, regardless of their merit or demerit.

Just as was the case with Ramakrishna and Surendra, there are examples in the life of Christ of the guru’s grace descending, that is, when he

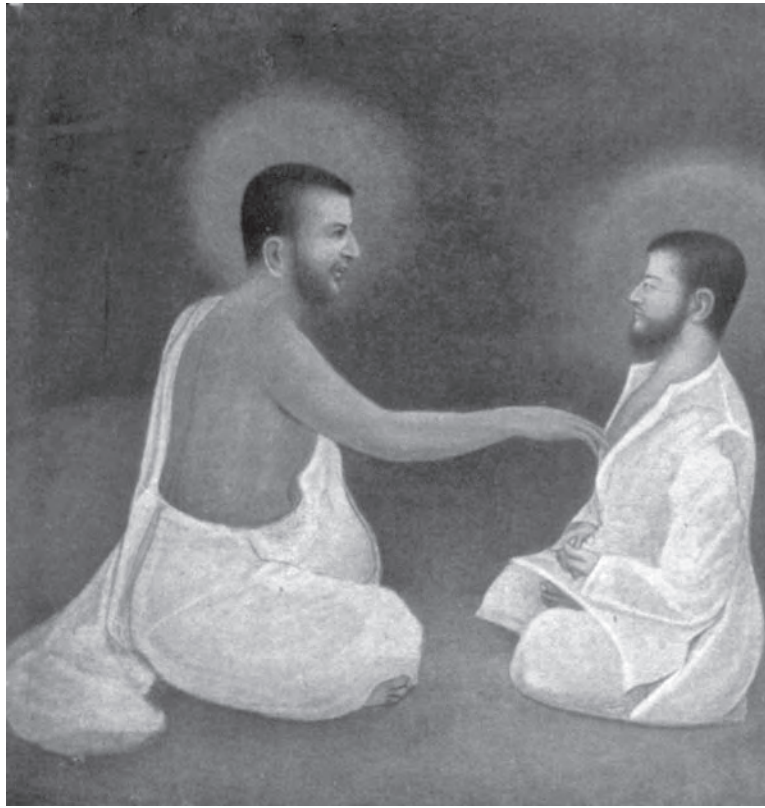
would suddenly say to someone ‘your sins are forgiven.’ In Christian terms, this ‘forgiveness of sins’ is no small matter, and can be translated into Vedantic terms, I believe, as the full assurance of salvation—spiritual realization—resulting from the sudden purification of the devotees’ minds by Christ’s grace. An especially memorable example of this sudden descent of grace occurs in a scene, when Christ was invited by a Pharisee, or learned pundit, for dinner. A ‘sinful woman’ also showed up, who washed his feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. Commentators tend to agree that Christ’s explanation to the dinner group of her surprising act of devotion—‘her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love’—indicate clearly that her loving act of devotion was not the cause but the effect of her sins having already been forgiven by a prior free act of grace on Christ’s part. Still, when Christ suddenly turned towards her and said ‘Your sins are forgiven,’<sup>4</sup> his statement understandably created quite an uproar at the Pharisee’s table! Why should such a sinful and undeserving person be singled out for this extraordinary act of grace? What a strange, and even disturbing, paradox!

Swami Vivekananda addressed the paradox directly when he was once asked ‘is there, sir, any law of grace?’: ‘Those who are pure always

**W**hat is vijñāna? It is knowing God in a special way. The awareness and conviction that fire exists in wood is jñāna, knowledge. But to cook rice on that fire, eat the rice, and get nourishment from it is vijñāna. To know by one’s inner experience that God exists is jñāna. But to talk to Him, to enjoy Him as Child, as Friend, as Master, as Beloved, is vijñāna. The realization that God alone has become the universe and all living beings is vijñāna.

—*Gospel*, 288.





*Sri Ramakrishna Putting Narendranath in the State of Samadhi*

in body, mind, and speech, who have strong devotion, who discriminate between the real and the unreal, who persevere in meditation and contemplation—upon them alone the grace of the Lord descends.<sup>35</sup> That would seem to answer the question: grace comes to the spiritually deserving, but not to the undeserving. But then Swamiji went on to radically qualify the first part of his answer:

The Lord, however, is beyond all natural laws—is not under any rules and regulations, or just as Shri Ramakrishna used to say, He has the child's nature—and that's why we find some failing to get any response even after calling on Him for millions of births, while someone else whom we regard as a sinful or penitent man or a disbeliever, would have Illumination in a flash!—on the latter the Lord perhaps lavishes His grace quite unsolicited! (ibid.)

Of course, one obvious argument against this position might be that such a person is only apparently undeserving—that in a past life he had meditated and struggled spiritually—tried mightily to work out his salvation with diligence—and so was in fact quite deserving. But Swamiji will have none of this:

You may argue that this man had good merits stored up from previous life, but the mystery is really difficult to understand. ... Ah, all reasoning and arguing is within the limit of the realm of Maya; it lies within the categories of space, time, and causation. But He is beyond these categories. ... He on whom His grace descends, in a moment goes beyond all law. For this reason there is no condition in grace (481–2).

This is a paradoxical position not only illustrated in Christ's *Parable of the Lost Sheep*, the lost

sheep was lost presumably because he had strayed from the herd—a bad decision if you are a sheep, but also in Paul's famous declaration: 'For by grace have you been saved through faith; and that not of your selves, it is the gift of God.'<sup>6</sup> So there is a paradox that seems to remain unresolved: why should the undeserving be blessed with grace?

But this apparently free and spontaneous 'fall of grace' is only part of the picture.

Ramakrishna was careful not to overplay—or underplay—the role of grace, in this instance, as regards the question of the attainment of both knowledge and devotion by the same person, in an interesting conversation with M. that caused the Master to fall silent for a while before giving a definitive reply:

[Master] Is it possible for all to comprehend the nature of God? Can a oneseer pot hold five seers of milk?

M: 'But what about the grace of God? Through His grace a camel can pass through the eye of a needle.'

Master: 'But is it possible to obtain God's grace just like that? A beggar may get a penny, if he asks for it. But suppose he asks you right off for his train fare. How about that?'

M. stood silent. The Master, too, remained silent. Suddenly he said: 'Yes, it is true. Through the grace of God some may get both jnana and bhakti.'<sup>7</sup>

In another conversation, Ramakrishna defined a class of devotees called *kripasiddha* as 'those on whom the grace of God descends all of a sudden and who at once attain His vision and Knowledge. Such people may be likened to a room that has been dark a thousand years, which, when a lamp is brought into it, becomes light immediately, not little by little' (182–3).

On a later occasion Ramakrishna defined this group in contrast to those whose spiritual practices would seem to have qualified them for spiritual

realization: 'Those who have realized God through austerity, japa, and the like, are called sadhanasiddha, perfect through spiritual discipline. Again, there are those called kripasiddha, perfect through divine grace. These last may be compared to a room kept dark a thousand years, which becomes light the moment a lamp is brought in' (483).

Two more questions still remain for our consideration. In Ramakrishna's teachings it is clear that, on the one hand, there is the grace of God that descends, and, on the other, that there is the grace of the guru that descends. But is it possible that it is the same grace in both cases? Ramakrishna often said that Satchidananda is the only Guru. In the grace of a fully enlightened guru is it not Divine Grace that is at work? In Christianity there is the same ambiguity to be found. In the Gospel of John there is a scene in which, after his resurrection, Christ appears to his apostles in the locked room in which they have taken refuge from persecution:

Suddenly Jesus appeared in the middle of the group. He greeted them and showed them his hands and his side [the marks of the wounds of his crucifixion]. When the disciples saw the Lord, they became very happy.

After Jesus had greeted them again, he said, 'I am sending you, just as the Father has sent me.' Then he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they will be forgiven.'<sup>8</sup>

The passage seems straightforward enough, although not all commentators agree: Christ is


One doesn't really need to study the different scriptures. If one has no discrimination, one doesn't achieve anything through mere scholarship, even though one studies all the six systems of philosophy. Call on God, crying to Him secretly in solitude. He will give all that you need.

—Gospel, 292.

giving to his closest disciples, the Apostles, the same power to 'forgive sins' that he had exercised himself in his life on Earth. To translate this into Vedantic terms: Christ has given them his own power to bestow enlightenment or at least a taste of enlightenment on whomever they wish. Similarly, the power of Ramakrishna's grace was to continue to manifest itself after his death in the case of some of his fully realised disciples. As we have seen, this 'forgiveness of sins' designates an extraordinary act of grace; in such 'forgiveness' there seems to be no calculation of merit or demerit. Thus such 'forgiveness of sins' is no small matter, and, given the spiritual stature of Christ, must be translated, in terms that pertain also to Ramakrishna, as involving 'perfection [enlightenment] through the grace of the guru.' To the question as to whether the grace of the guru is, if not in form, at least in substance, the grace of God, an affirmative answer seems to be a reasonable position.

As we have seen, even Vivekananda concluded that 'the mystery [of grace] is really difficult to understand.' Grace is thus for him a mystery that cannot be explained away. All the same, one might glimpse the presence of a certain logic in the way it 'descends,' even if this logical consideration does not solve the actual mystery. If, as the *Katha Upanishad* affirms, the Self is realised by the one whom the Self chooses<sup>9</sup>; and if the Self that is realised is the very 'I' of the spiritual aspirant, ultimately who is it then who chooses whom? If the Self is beyond the world of Maya and hence, as Vivekananda argued, beyond the realm of space, time, and causation, nothing in the world could 'cause' the Self to grant realization to anyone through an act of grace. From the standpoint of logic, it would seem to be a case—ultimately—of the self-willed ever-free Self choosing to liberate itself. Whenever the Self wishes to liberate itself,

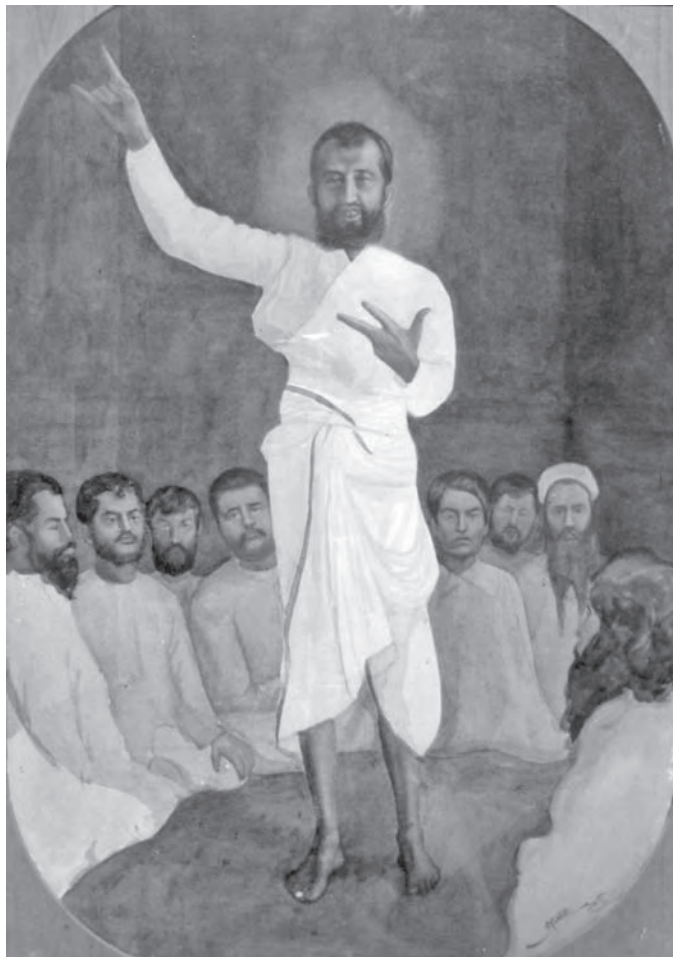
it is free to do so, and one can call this blessed moment an act of grace, but one can also call it an act of the Self's self-liberation. But why does this blessed event apparently occur sometimes with some people but not with others? One is forced to conclude that the mystery of the descent of grace is ultimately beyond logic and remains ... a mystery.

Another consideration concerning the paradox of grace might involve the question of cause and effect in the world of Maya. Even if the supreme Self is conceived, as in Advaita, as being beyond Maya, nevertheless it is in the world of Maya that the individual self appears to obtain enlightenment. This would prompt the speculation that the illusory world of Maya may not be entirely governed by apparent cause and effect. Grace is also a phenomenon within Maya, but itself seems to be beyond cause and effect. If the world of Maya were an entirely closed system, it would be a prison from which it would be impossible to escape. But the paradox of grace suggests that it also contains within itself an escape hole—a dimension of freedom from the iron law of cause and effect. In other words, as a partially open system, Maya provides for the possibility of an escape from Maya. 'Grace' would simply be a way of conceptualizing this possibility. 

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# Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita: *Telugu Edition*

I S Madugula and Sudha Emany

Diverse courses of worship  
from varied springs of fulfilment  
have mingled in your meditation.  
The manifold revelation of the joy of the Infinite  
has given form to a shrine of unity in your life  
where from far and near arrive salutations  
to which I join my own.<sup>1</sup>

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## *The Origins*

THE NAME *Kathamrita* derives from the Bhagavata Purana.<sup>2</sup> The story of Bhagavan is Bhagavata. Because it is the story of Bhagavan, it is *amrita*, ambrosia, the drink of gods. It makes them immortal—*a-mrita*. The headmaster devotee M.—Mahendranath Gupta—decided to collect his conversations with Sri Ramakrishna that occurred over some two hundred and fifty days during the last four and one-half years of

the latter's life and publish them in Bengali. The teachings are immortal, so there is a special 'goodness of fit' of the title to their near stenographic record in the form of *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*.

The book had tremendous success in the original Bengali—Sri Ramakrishna had already become a household name and a phenomenon. It was clearly destined to become a classic. It was then only a matter of time before the divine food was shared with the rest of the world and the opus appeared in other languages.

The Bengali edition was published in five volumes over three decades, the first appearing in 1902 and the last in 1932, with the tacit approval of the Holy Mother. Kathamrita Bhawan, Calcutta, was the first publisher. The most influential English translation of this classic by Swami Nikhilananda appeared in 1942. Several other translations appeared eventually, both in English and other languages, attesting to the demand for the Paramahansa's life—we can never have enough of nectar—greatly enriching the cannon.

Soon a whole literary movement started across the country that centered around the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda. An anthology of articles from different regions titled *Like the Gentle Dew* was compiled by Swami Atmashradhdhananda of the Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. We make a special mention of the anthology here because it contains an essay by Professor M Sivaramakrishna, Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad. His essay on 'Telugu Literature' discusses the impact of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement on Telugu speakers.

This article concerns itself with the Telugu edition of Kathamrita.

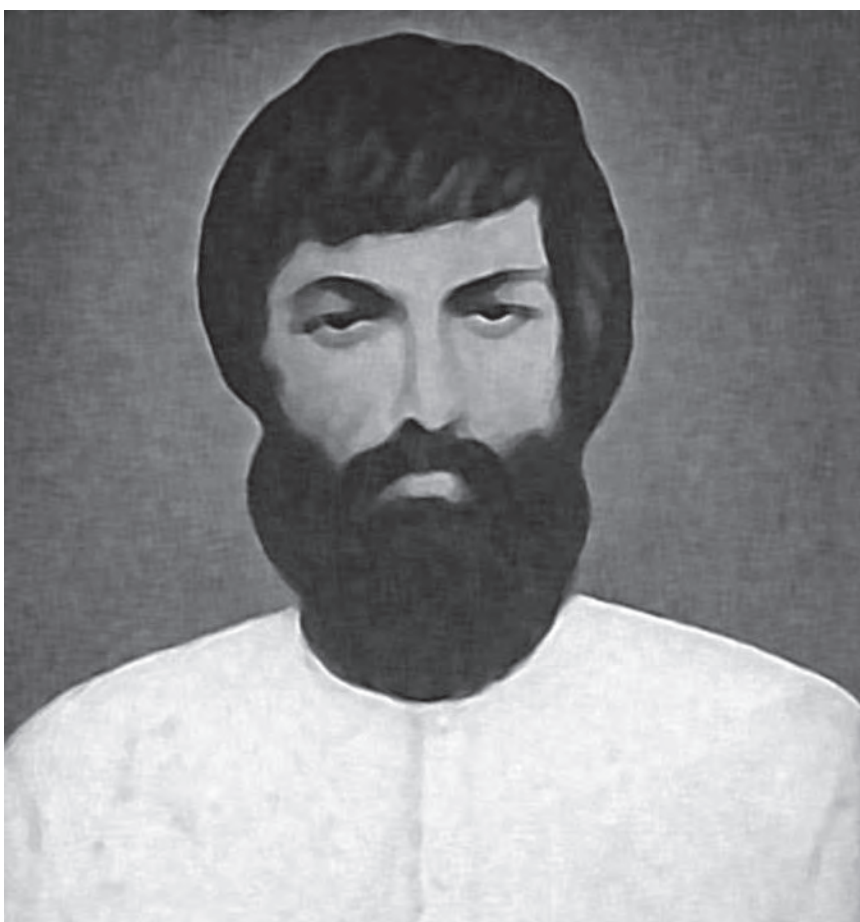
### ***The Saint in Telugu Land***

It would be hardly an exaggeration to say that the Telugu-speaking people very early on adopted

Sri Ramakrishna and sort of made him their own. There seems to have been a latent affinity between the Bengali saint and the Southern folks both literary and common. Anecdotally, one may say that when Sri Ramakrishna fed the sweet rice pudding to the well-known Telugu Saint of the times Trilinga Swami, whom he declared to be 'Walking Siva', in Varanasi with his own hands, the Telugus reciprocated the maternal affection manifold.

The early attention shown by Telugu writers to Sri Ramakrishna is a testimony to the regard that the Telugu region had for him. His life and teachings were recounted by Kuchi Narasimham in a 1904 poem, which instantly struck a chord with the Telugu people and raised their awareness of the modern saint of Bengal. Two eminent Telugu writers and social reformers of the late nineteenth-early twentieth-century from Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh, appear to have been the first to call the attention of the region to the saint. Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu mentions him in one of his journals. Fellow-writer Chilakamarti Lakshmi Narasimham, who has a prolific literary output in the form of plays, poems, novels, and translations from the Sanskrit, rendered some of Sri Ramakrishna's parables into mellifluous and formal Telugu. We have a sample story still in print, *The Yogi and the Serpent*.

A sudden spurt in the popularity of the life and work of Sri Ramakrishna occurred in the Telugu land in 1943 with the publication of Jonnalagadda Satyanarayana's (1906–65) *Sam-poorna Bhakta Vijayam*, some thirteen years before the 'official' biography of Sri Ramakrishna was written by Swami Chirantananda of the Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, with a critical introduction by Veluri Sivarama Sastry. Jonnalagadda gives detailed accounts of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi, and Nag Mahasay in his Telugu work in great detail and much reverence.



*A Portrait of Sri 'M.' Showing M. in his Younger Days*

This work is very significant in the canon of Ramakrishna literature in Telugu, judging from the fact that the author devotes ten pages to his life, adding his own translations of some of the teachings from the *Kathamrita*, and more translations of some of the early conversations and spiritual discussions from the original. The literary significance of this publication was critiqued by the famous writer of the time Sripada Krishnamurti Sastri in glowing terms.

Moving along, we note that in the 1930s there was a biography of Sri Ramakrishna in Telugu by Bulusu Ventakteswarlu, *Sri Ramakrishna Vivekananda Ramatirthula Jeevitopadesamulu*. Some four decades later, a classical biography of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda was written by the well-known Telugu scholar Divakarla Venkatavadhani, *Guru Sisbyulu*.

We mention this brief history of the

antecedents to the formal complete translation of *Kathamrita* into Telugu to delineate the kind of excitement and pent-up demand that had existed by now for a full-scale translation of the work.

Then it happened in 1976.

### ***The Chennai Math and The Telugu Edition***

In 1976, then president of the Chennai Ramakrishna Math and vice-president of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Tapasyananda, realised that a Telugu edition

**I**t is said that those who serve others for twelve years or so become slaves. They acquire the traits of those they serve. While serving their masters they acquire the rajas, the tamas, the spirit of violence, the love of luxury, and the other traits of their masters. —*Gospel*, 297.



of the work was long overdue and decided to do something about it. It was entirely through his efforts and inspired by his vision, the first of the five volumes of the Bengali *Kathamrita* were translated into Telugu by Pravrajika Shyamaprana and published by the Chennai Math. It soon captured the minds and hearts of millions of Telugu speakers and more than justified the translation effort. The publication was an instant hit. The remaining four volumes followed gradually, with Volume 5 appearing in 1985.

A publication's popularity and success are gauged by its sales numbers and reprints. The Telugu *Kathamrita* quickly racked up a number of reprints, without any substantive changes, even though by then a clear need had appeared for an update.

But things happen only when they are destined to happen. That destiny had finally been fulfilled with the year 2000 edition. The impetus for this beautiful effort came once again from the Chennai Math where, Swami Jnanadananda, currently Adhyaksha of the Hyderabad Ramakrishna Math, was the manager at the time.

### **Ground-breaking Year 2000 Edition**

It was not a re-issue of the old volumes. In spirit, intention, appearance, and utility, it was a totally new edition in its own right.

A significant aspect of this edition is that it was closely compared with the original and all necessary additions and changes were dutifully carried out. M.'s record abounds in descriptions of nature, meticulous details about places and people in the story, songs by devotees, M.'s thoughts on Sri Ramakrishna and, of course, the teachings of the Master. As a complete and faithful rendering of the original, all these elements were placed in their proper contexts, based on the English *Gospel*. Some items omitted in the English version were also included, thus making

the 2000 Telugu edition a most complete translation of *Kathamrita*. As an aside, we note that this particular translation used the Tamil original.

This greatly improved edition had the following special features:

1. A new preface and a side-by-side display of a page from the original and the word-for-word Telugu translation were included for purposes of comparison.
2. The language and style were vastly improved over the earlier edition, with special focus on simplicity of presentation.
3. The events described were now in chronological order.
4. Sri Ramakrishna's songs originally omitted were included in the new edition in Telugu, as translated by the late Sri B S R Anjaneyulu of Bapatla, Andhra Pradesh, a sincere devotee and founder of the local Ashrama.
5. The original five volumes were reduced to three for ease of handling by readers.
6. Sri Ramakrishna's life in chronological order is at the end of volume one.
7. Three appendices were added, including a concise, much-welcome biography of M. as Appendix 3.
8. Each volume has its own index.
9. A song index and glossary of technical terms were also included.

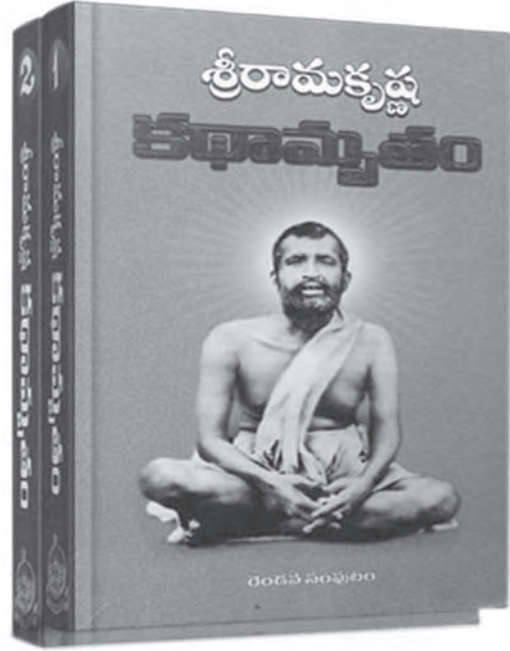
Nineteenth century India witnessed an unprecedented religious renaissance giving rise to a number of significant movements, especially in Bengal. In his daily conversations with people, Sri Ramakrishna made references to them continually. Thus it would be hard to grasp the full significance of his discourses without at least a modicum of familiarity with these movements. To facilitate this, brief accounts of these movements were included in the appendices. Short introductions to the personages participating in the conversations were also added.

### Newly Improved and Augmented 2016 Edition

This happened after the Telugu publication department was moved from Chennai to Hyderabad in 2006.

Despite its popularity and demand for the publication, the next—and the current—edition of the Telugu *Kathamrita* had to wait until 2016. This is a gem of an edition, with a number of additional improvements over the 2000 version which, in its own right, was quite adequate. Nevertheless it has been fine-tuned to be even more user-friendly. Here are some of the improvements:

1. The number of volumes has been reduced from three to two, with a larger print run.
2. A major visually noticeable change in this edition is the division of the chapters into subheads—*paricchedas*, and topics. Each named topic is included in parentheses in bold type and embedded in the text. The subheads and topics are included in the running text. A *pariccheda* usually is a situation or an event and the ‘topics’ are Sri Ramakrishna’s explanations in context. For instance, the first of three *paricchedas* in Chapter Two, devoted to Sri Ramakrishna’s god-intoxicated dance at Balaram’s house is further subdivided into two topics, reconciliation of all religions and the deep significance of the love of the gopis. Sometimes discussions on a specific subject are included in a *pariccheda* and the ‘topics’ could be the related elaborations, explanations, examples, or parables by the Master. For instance, Chapter Three, third *pariccheda* on Vedanta has three related topics on the changeless Brahman, *nirvikalpa* samadhi, and Self-Realization.
3. The table of contents is analytical and more detailed than before, with subheads and topics under each. There are page numbers noted for the minutest of topics appearing under a chapter heading. If someone is in a hurry, all one has to do is just browse the



Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita—Telugu Translation

table of contents. For instance, the Master explained the necessity for God with and without form in a number of places across the volume. You can find all those locations in the Contents themselves without flipping pages to the index in the back. In short, the arrangement serves as a keyword-in-context (KWIC) index, a staple in information retrieval. This is of course in addition to the regular index to the volume.

4. Also all Sanskrit verses culled by M. from the Bhagavadgita, *Taittiriyaopanishad*, *Mahanirvana Tantra*, *Gopikagitam*, and so on

**W**e do not see the sky rightly. It looks as if the sky were touching the ground at the horizon. How can a man see correctly? His mind is delirious, like the mind of a typhoid patient. ... Truly it is a state of delirium. Just see how worldly men quarrel among themselves. No one knows what they quarrel about. Oh, how they quarrel! 'May such and such a thing befall you!' How much shouting! How much abuse! —*Gospel*, 298.

are now presented in the text to enervise the narrative.

5. Furthermore, four recently discovered entries from M.'s diary (25 August 1886, 2 September 1886, 12 October 1886, and 17 February 1887), published in the monthly in *Navya Bharat* in 1904, are now printed as Appendix Three.
6. The biography of M appears as Appendix Four.
7. This edition has added all available photographs at appropriate locations in the text.

### ***The Challenges of Translation***

The business of translation is tricky at best and treacherous at worst. The risk comes with the

territory. No two translators can ever come up with an identical trans-language rendering of the same original. This is because no two languages, even closely related languages, share the same idiom or nuance.

It appears that the translator has handled this responsibility with much grace and aplomb.

Since the Telugu *Kathamrita* is a 'word-for-word' translation, we do not need to worry about which material in the original to choose and which to eschew for esthetic or cultural reasons. By and large the translation is faithful, so much so that even stage directions in the original have been translated.

One problem however for the translator is how to render Sri Ramakrishna's colourful rural

*Sri Ramakrishna's Room in Kashipur Garden House*





dialect into the genteel speech of the *bhadralok*. Apparently M. himself took care of much of it. It should be remembered at the same time that Sri Ramakrishna's preferred mode of communication is highly effective, crisp, and to the point even if it sometimes lacked sophistication as his contemporary city-dwellers knew it.

The Telugu translator still had to deal with the issues of class dialect and its social implications. Therefore the strategy that seems to have been adopted is to judiciously mingle Sanskritised and Dravidian lexis freely and interchangeably, with a sprinkling of English.

### **The Translator's Common Sense Approach**

The English expressions have been left in as needed, retaining the flavor of the original conversation. Of course, Sri Ramakrishna himself used the expression 'Thank you' jocularly while talking to Dr Sarkar. The Master was as funny as the next person, when the occasion warranted humor. He remained a child throughout his life, which is one of the many endearing qualities about him.

Generally speaking, the style is breezy and contributes to the smooth flow of the sentences and their meaning. No jolts there of any sort. Where English words or, for that matter, any obscure or archaic or technical terms are used, alternative Telugu terms or their English equivalents are provided in parentheses. Once in a while a highly formal word might intrude in an otherwise informal discourse, obviously for technical reasons or when an alternative term would not be as effective or have the same impact on the rest of the sentence.

In many places, hybrid verbs or phrases occur, where probably using the Sanskrit equivalent would sound pedantic or artificial.

While usually the sentences are short,


longer sentences do occur, maybe mimicking the original.

Literary Sanskrit terms are used where they are the most appropriate, the shortest, or familiar. For instance, *asamkhyaka*—innumerable, *ananta pragati*—infinite progress.

Formal to informal register transitions and vice versa frequently occur, as called for by the context.

To sum up, the translator's style is eminently suited to the subject matter, keeping in mind the general readership. The work is not necessarily intended for scholars or professionals but the sincere intelligent reader conversant with religious literature. Its popularity attests to its success as a much-appreciated hagiography of the Paramahansa who is immensely popular among Telugu speakers.

Sri Ramakrishna boldly and unequivocally declared that he had seen God firsthand. Hence, Mahatma Gandhi: 'The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face.'<sup>3</sup>

In the Telugu edition of *Kathamrita*, we have that rare combination of a genuine saint's life narrated in the easy and engaging idiom of a dedicated translator. What more can the Telugu public ask for? 

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**W**ho can ever know God? I don't even try. I only call on Him as Mother. Let Mother do whatever She likes. I shall know Her if it is Her will; but I shall be happy to remain ignorant if She wills otherwise.—*Gospel*, 299.



# *Engagements with* **The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna—A Survey**

**Dr Arpita Mitra**

**T**HERE HAS BEEN a long-standing tradition of scholarly engagement with Sri Ramakrishna, who is primarily known to the world through his teachings as recorded in the diary of Mahendranath Gupta, better known as 'M'. These jottings later came out as

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the *Kathamrita*, translated into English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. This essay is an attempt at surveying the scholarly literature available on Sri Ramakrishna's ideas as expressed in the *Kathamrita* and mapping the reception of this text in Indian and international academia. It is by no means an exhaustive survey, but a representative one. Academic works on the *Kathamrita* have dealt with different aspects of

Sri Ramakrishna's teachings from different disciplinary perspectives—broadly, from the points of view of philosophy, social history, gender and sexuality studies, and religious studies—although it is not always possible to hermetically segregate one category from the other. Leaving aside works or arguments from the perspective of gender and sexuality, I shall deal in this essay with some representative and important studies in the other three categories.

### **Ethics and metaphysics**

Bimal Krishna Matilal, the famous scholar of philosophy, has a little-known essay on Sri Ramakrishna titled 'Sṛī Rāmākṛṣṇa: Simplicity with Profundity'.<sup>1</sup> The title itself summarises Matilal's position that Ramakrishna's teachings were at once simple yet profound. In this short essay, Matilal deals with two excerpts from the *Kathamrita*—one on ethics and the other on metaphysics. Matilal discusses the famous snake parable of 'hissing in self-defense but not biting' from the *Kathamrita* to illustrate his point about Ramakrishna being 'an embodiment of Practical Reason'. Here, Matilal contrasts the solution proffered by Ramakrishna to the one suggested by Gandhi in a somewhat similar situation of moral dilemma, and it is clear that for Matilal, Ramakrishna wins with his highly ethical yet extremely pragmatic approach to the issue. I quote Matilal's summary of Gandhi's view:

Once Gandhiji was confronted with such a question from Raychanbhai Mehta. It runs like this. Suppose a snake has come to bite me, shall I not kill it?

An idealistic answer was given in this way. Let the snake bite. Oh, maybe it is not poisonous and you will experience some pain but you will not die. It will be a small price to pay in order to save your life's principle of non-violence. Non-violence is after all a principle of life around which all your activities and thoughts

will be interwoven. Or you may die because the snake is poisonous. But can you really give up your life's principle for fear of death? If you die for the sake of maintaining this glorious principle, you will certainly be better in your own life after death. From the Hindu point of view (and Gandhiji was a Hindu) one can say that you will have a better life in your *next birth*, for you are dying for a noble cause. It needs great courage to accept death in this way, and great moral courage is the most adorable (ethical) virtue on earth. Non-violence, in spite of its political overtone and past involvement, is not or need not be an instrument for achieving some goal, it is the goal itself. It is its own reward. (17).

In contrast to this, is Ramakrishna's well-known position—there is a middle path out of the situation. In Ramakrishna's parable, the snake need not bite in aggression or in self-defense—all it needs to do is hiss, so that both the principle of non-violence and its own life are maintained. This is an ethical and pragmatic solution. For Ramakrishna, simplicity and innocence were one thing, and foolishness quite another. To me, *this* seems to be a more 'Hindu' approach to the issue—an approach that never failed to take into account the contingent. Moreover, what about the moral responsibility of allowing another person to commit the evil act of killing an innocent creature? Ramakrishna, of course, did not enter into the theorization about it, but the point was clear from his parable that certain

**O** Mother! O Embodiment of Om! Mother, how many things people say about Thee! But I don't understand any of them. I don't know anything, Mother. ... I have sought protection in Thee. O Mother, I pray only that I may have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet, love that seeks no return. And Mother, do not delude me with Thy world-bewitching maya. I seek Thy protection. I have taken refuge in Thee. —*Gospel*, 299.



ethical dilemmas in life often require a pragmatic solution more than anything else; however, this pragmatism is pragmatism and not cunningness.

Regarding ethics, many of Ramakrishna's sayings have been misunderstood as well. In an article, John Rosselli supports his claim that Ramakrishna was uninterested in social questions by citing his parable about *lathiyals* keeping rough village tenants in control, meaning that evil is necessary in the world.<sup>2</sup> I think it is far-fetched to derive his lack of interest in social action from this explication about the necessity of evil in the world. However, it does appear that Ramakrishna's treatment of ethics, the problem of evil and so on have received scant attention in academic works, save many scholars' repeated criticisms that he disparaged philanthropy which he did not *in toto*—but that's another debate.

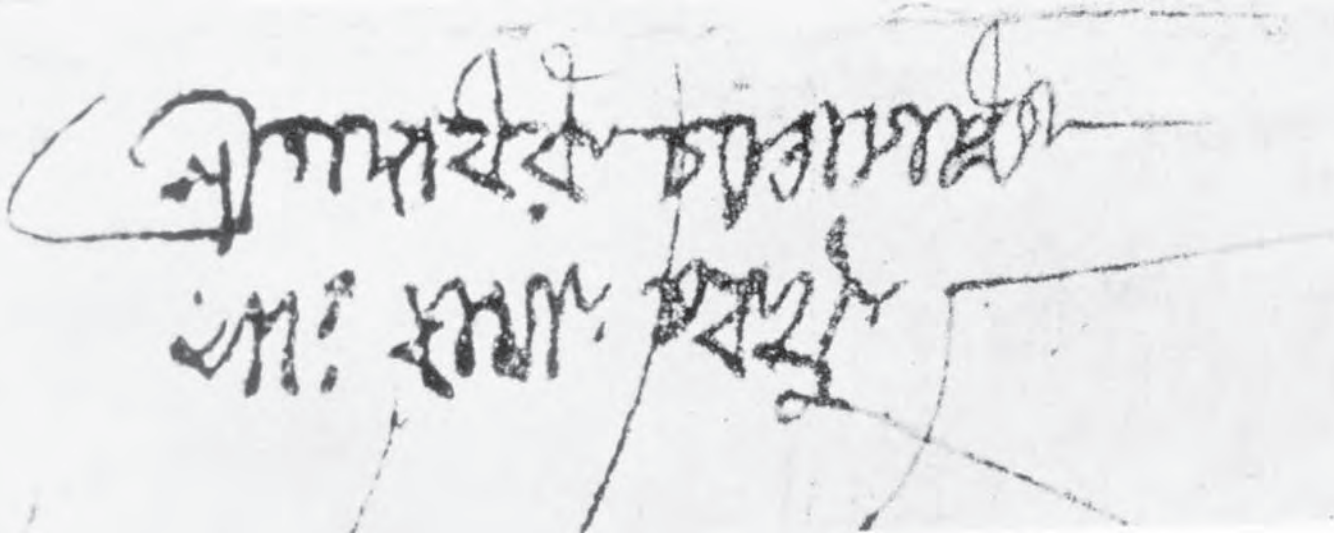
Coming back to Matilal, he provides yet another sensitive reading from the *Kathamrita*—this time, on a metaphysical issue. Once again, I quote at length from Matilal:

To use one of [Ramakrishna's] similes to illustrate a difficult point of the Vedānta metaphysics: 'If a doll made of salt goes to measure the depth of the ocean, what will happen?' One may recall here that to measure is also to know, for in Sanskrit the root *mā* means both to measure and to know. In Bengali, he also used the root *māpā*. Perhaps this was not a coincidence. It was suggestive—a *dhvani*. Raising the above question, he continued, 'Of course, the depth will never be measured in this way, for the depth is unmeasurable! Why? Because before the doll reaches the bottom to measure, its *salty* body will melt completely into the saline water of the ocean. And what will happen? In this way, there will be a complete loss of identity of the measurer (or knower) and total merging of the *doll* into the undifferentiated mass of water.' This is the merging of the individual identity into the undifferentiated mass of consciousness which is called Brahman. The line between the

experience and the object of experience, sometimes called the subject-object duality, will be lost for ever. The agent, action and object will be in one unbroken line. The measurer, measuring and the object of measurement will melt into one whole unity. This is called Brahman experience. Can there be any simpler, any more direct, and at the same time any more convincing example than this one? It goes straight into the heart. It need not be filtered through the intellect because it is already filtered! A thousand lines of abstract philosophical discourse could be opaque to the readers. But this presentation, this explanation, is crystal clear. The doctrine of the dissolution of subject-object duality may sound enigmatic to a common man. But the simile dispels the enigma and even the common man can *see* the meaning of the doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

### Social History

This very fine reading of metaphysics in the *Kathamrita* by Matilal is in sharp contrast to Partha Chatterjee's essay where the author examines, through the text of *Kathamrita*, the creation of a 'new religion for urban domestic life'.<sup>4</sup> What is not clear to me, however, is to whom he attributes this creation. For, in his own words, he reads the *Kathamrita* 'not so much as a text that tells us about Ramakrishna as one which tells us a great deal about the Bengali middle class.' For Chatterjee, the *Kathamrita* is 'a document of the fears and anxieties of a class aspiring to hegemony'. His work is situated within the framework of Subaltern Studies, and as such, he is interested in mapping the 'subalternity of an elite'—the Calcutta middle class under the hegemonic rule of the British in this case—through the text of *Kathamrita*. In this process, it appears to me, he almost ends up erasing Ramakrishna from the picture. Then, is he arguing that his urban middle-class disciples, quite independent of the Master, constructed this 'new religion' of 'urban domesticity'? Perhaps that is what he implies.



Sri Ramakrishna's Signature in Bengali

While his arguments about the anxieties of the Calcutta middle class might be true, not taking into account the agency of Sri Ramakrishna in this entire process reduces Chatterjee's position to only a partial one that can easily be questioned on this ground. Of course, on the face of it, Chatterjee's argument has yet another problem: that he considers this spiritual tradition a 'religion of urban domesticity'. This position is clearly informed by his own location as a social scientist operating not only within a disciplinary framework but also an ideological one.

While Matilal's was a study from a philosophical perspective, historian Sumit Sarkar and political scientist Partha Chatterjee are the most famous of those scholars who have approached the text as a source for the social history of colonial Bengal, and both their works hinge upon the relationship between the *Kathamrita* and the *bhadralok* or middle class in nineteenth-century Calcutta. The other historian Amiya Sen's numerous writings on the *Kathamrita* and on Sri Ramakrishna are located between social and intellectual history. In the following paragraphs, I shall engage with some of their arguments.

Both Chatterjee and Sarkar have commented extensively on the language and narrative structure of the *Kathamrita*. They especially draw our attention to the sharp contrast between the colloquial idiom and rustic motifs used by Sri Ramakrishna and the mostly English framing of sub-titles and comparative references to either European philosophy or formal Hindu scriptures by M. According to them, all this, along with M.'s anxiety and emphasis upon *authentic* documentation are the characteristics of a newly-formed English-educated elite.

Chatterjee's description of the middle class of nineteenth-century Calcutta is one of an impotent subjugated class, plagued by the fears of the modern rhythms of life and work under colonial

**A**t the beginning of spiritual life the devotee should observe such rites as pilgrimage, putting a string of beads around his neck, and so forth. But outward ceremonies gradually drop off as he attains the goal, the vision of God. Then his only activity is the repetition of God's name, and contemplation and meditation on Him.

—Gospel, 305.

domination, and the oppressive domination of the supposedly superior European epistemic premises, yet aspiring for hegemony within this context of domination. According to Chatterjee, what this middle class found most oppressive was the discourse of Reason: 'The invariable implication it carried of the historical necessity of colonial rule and its condemnation of indigenous culture as the storehouse of unreason, or (in a stage-of-civilization argument) of reason yet unborn—which only colonial rule would bring to birth ... It was an oppression which the middle-class mind often sought to escape' (46). And Ramakrishna's teachings apparently provided that escape! This almost sounds like a sophisticated presentation of the Marxist 'religion is the opium of the people' argument—that people turn to religion seeking escape from the hardships of life. Many do, indeed, and Ramakrishna himself mentioned such people, whose apparent renunciation is caused by a temporary disenchantment due to the blows of life, and it lasts as long as this disgruntlement lasts. But that is not all there is to religion, which is not merely a form of social regulation, but in its spiritual aspect, constitutes the fundamental existential quest of humankind.

How did the Ramakrishna phenomenon provide the escape from the 'prison house of reason'? By advocating 'withdrawal from *karma*' and 'withdrawal from *jnana*'. In support of this argument all Chatterjee does is quote some excerpts from the *Kathamrita*. With regard to *karma*, he then explains:

Worldly pursuits occupy a domain of selfish and particular interests. It is a domain of conflict, of domination and submission, of social norms,

legal regulations, disciplinary rules enforced by the institutions of power. It is a domain of constant flux, ups and downs of fortune, a domain of greed and of humiliation. It is a domain which the worldly householder cannot do without, but it is one which he has to enter because of the force of circumstances over which he has no control. But he can always escape into his own world of consciousness, where worldly pursuits are forgotten, where they have no essential existence. This is the inner world of devotion, a personal relation of bhakti with the Supreme Being.

The strategy of survival in a world that is dominated by the rich and the powerful is withdrawal. Do not attempt to intervene in the world, do not engage in futile conflict, do not try to reform the world. Those who do these things do so not because they wish to change the world for the better but because they too pursue their particular interests—fame, popularity, power (50).

The suggestion here is clearly that the inner realm of devotion is nothing more than a safe haven, where the hapless recede, unable to counter the torments of the world. 'The public self of the intelligentsia was its political self—rationalist, modern, expressing itself within the hegemonic discursive domain of enlightened nationalism. The private self was where it retreated from the humiliation of a failed hegemony' (65).

Undoubtedly, the inner domain of pure devotion appears all rosy to Chatterjee and he seems to have little idea about how difficult it is for an ordinary person, entangled in the worldly quagmire of 'I and mine', to enter this domain in the first place, let alone sustain the sufferings that are especially earmarked for the devotee of God. We do not enter worldly relationships due to 'the force of circumstances', but on account of our own desires, leading to specific *karma* and their effects. Anyway, this would perhaps be an altogether different paradigm for Chatterjee to consider.

**T**here are many kinds of spiritual aspirants. Those endowed with *sattva* perform their spiritual practices secretly. They look like ordinary people, but they meditate inside the mosquito net. —*Gospel*, 306.



Coming back to the historical dimension, the harsh circumstances of worldly life was nothing new to colonial times. Worldly life has always been difficult; modernity might have at best aggravated the hardships. And Hinduism has always argued for renunciation as the only means for salvation. I do not dispute the point that colonialism created a particular kind of crisis among the dominant class, and that the Ramakrishna phenomenon did largely address this crisis. All I am saying is that one cannot reduce the phenomenon and its impact to merely a promised 'escape' from these predicaments. No escape lasts longer than a whimper. Those who were drawn towards him, English-educated or otherwise, had a genuine spiritual inner core of longing for the eternal Truth, whether they approached it as formless or as endowed with form.

I have already dealt with the problems regarding Chatterjee's claim of 'withdrawal from *karma*' and 'withdrawal from *jnana*' in a previous publication<sup>5</sup>. In the *Kathamrita*, the word *karma* is used by Ramakrishna in three different senses depending on the context: (1) any activity—breathing, even prayer, meditation; (2) householders' duties; and (3) religious rituals. Ramakrishna, in fact, said that it is difficult to avoid work. Whatever else we might be doing, living itself involves doing certain basic activities. Work, especially duties, actually acts

as a purifying agent for the mind and prepares it for receiving higher knowledge, when work is done with detachment and no sense of ego. Ramakrishna, by the way, did not say that all those who engage in philanthropy do so out of a sense of ego or for ulterior motives—so Chatterjee has misrepresented his position. When he asked certain devotees not to get too entangled in work, what he meant was this: if one wished to realise God, then unnecessary involvement in too many activities, especially the ones that are likely to boost egotism—the attitude and



illusion of doership,—was not merely a distraction but a positive hindrance in the path of God-realization. This has also been the traditional understanding of Hinduism. Then, what was new about this new religion of urban domesticity? And if indeed, it was a religion of urban domesticity, then the argument about withdrawal from work does not make sense. Is Chatterjee then positing worldly pursuits against domestic life? What we understand as domestic or householder life is an inseparable extension of worldly pursuits; one is engaged in worldly activities, partly to sustain a domestic life; moreover, domestic life itself is worldly life. Hence, there are many loopholes, contradictions, and ambiguities in Chatterjee's overall position.

Let us now turn to Chatterjee's argument about jnana. Sri Ramakrishna is known to have held intellectual debates and reasoning as

inadequate means for God-realization. Following some citations to this effect, Chatterjee's brief and quick inference is: 'This attitude strikes a sympathetic chord in his disciples. They are convinced of the limits of science and rational knowledge, of their failure to grasp the truth in its eternal, unchanging essence. Trained in the new schools of colonialism, some like Narendranath in fact being highly proficient in several branches of modern European knowledge, they feel oppressed in the prison house of Reason and clamour to escape into the vicāra-less freedom of bhakti.'<sup>6</sup>

Anybody who has engaged with the primary literature of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition and with Hinduism in some depth would immediately spot how reductionist the above argument is. This expression 'withdrawal from jnana' itself is problematic. Can a saint



IMAGE: RAMAKRISHNA MUSEUM, BELUR MATH

and mystic—who is an embodiment of divine knowledge and the very purpose of whose life is to preach that knowledge to others—can ask for a ‘withdrawal from jnana’? Of course, what Chatterjee means is withdrawal from intellectual debates and reasoning, but his framing of the expression itself is quite flimsy.

Anyway, once again, Ramakrishna actually spoke of knowledge in three different senses in different contexts: (1) spiritual knowledge or knowledge that God alone is real; (2) the mental faculty of intellect and reason; and (3) book-learning, argumentation, discussion, debate, talking, and so on. The caution against book-learning and argumentation is not a new caution; nor is the fact of the limitation of the intellect being highlighted for the first time. No spiritual path can be purely an intellectual path, not even jnana marga with its heavy dose of *vi-chara*. Spiritual truths are to be realised, and this realization is not a merely intellectual exercise, although a clear intellect is an aid to a great extent. If the mind is not transformed through spiritual practices, mere intellection is not going to lead anywhere in any of the *yogas*. Secondly, Sri Ramakrishna often asked his devotees to engage in *vichara*—not the *vichara* that is intellectual argumentation, but the *vichara* that is the act of discrimination between the Real and the unreal.

Amiya Sen is right in pointing out: ‘Chatterjee in particular has strongly privileged the narrative over the subject, thereby creating a disjunction between Ramakrishna an historical actor in his own right and what was enacted around him.’<sup>7</sup> In fact, Chatterjee nowhere explicitly mentions that Ramakrishna deliberately constructed his teachings to appeal to the middle class. His suggestion seems to be rather that the middle class responded to his teachings, precisely because these afforded this much sought-after relief, and subsequently ‘appropriated’ him.

Hence, the Ramakrishna that comes across to us through the text of *Kathamrita* is a ‘mediated’ construction of primarily his middle-class disciple M. and others. The text, despite several efforts and disclaimers of its author as to its authenticity in terms of representing Ramakrishna’s views, is nonetheless a mediated text.

In a similar vein, Sumit Sarkar also points out that the ‘cult that developed around Ramakrishna remained an essentially *bhadralok* affair in Bengal.’<sup>8</sup> Sarkar finds ‘chakri’ and ‘kaliyuga’ to be two constant motifs in the *Kathamrita* and both these are related to the predicament of the *bhadralok* or the middle class in nineteenth-century Calcutta. According to him ‘chakri’ is ‘crucial for understanding Ramakrishna and situating him within the overall context of colonial domination’ (285). Ramakrishna’s world ‘stood in marked contrast particularly to the imposed world of formal routinised education and time-bound chakri’ (303). Sarkar discusses Ramakrishna’s dislike for ‘chakri’ and its various compromises, to which one is driven to due to worldly desires, and the particular plight of those young men he is fond of, owing to disturbances related to the professional life of ‘chakri’. ‘Chakri’, argues Sarkar, is ‘a “chronotope” of alienated time and space, late-nineteenth-century Kaliyuga’s heart of darkness, the principal format through which awareness of subjection spread among colonial middle-class males’ (309–10). The other and related recurring motif is of course Kaliyuga—the modern-day dystopia.

Sarkar’s argument is similar to Chatterjee’s:

**A**spirants endowed with *rajas* exhibit outward pomp—a string of beads around the neck, a mark on the forehead, an ochre robe, a silk cloth, a rosary with a gold bead, and so on. They are like stall-keepers advertising their wares with signboards.—*Gospel*, 306.



21/2/38  
 Cal: 24<sup>th</sup> By 24  
 1325  
 Dear Hem Chandra,  
 Your note to hand.  
 Holy clothe is probably  
 coming here this eve-  
 ning. Very glad to  
 learn that you are  
 shortly expected here.  
 We shall talk here  
 about your proposal  
 when you come  
 With best wishes  
 Yours Affly in the  
 Love  
 M

21/2/38  
 Cal: 30<sup>th</sup> By 24  
 6<sup>th</sup> July 1917  
 Dear Hem Babu,  
 Your kind & affec-  
 tionate note came duly  
 to hand.  
 Baburam Mah: was  
 seriously ill, but for  
 killing, he is now better.  
 Truly you are all  
 quite well, with the Lord's  
 blessing, ever yours affly  
 in the Love  
 M.

Letters Written by Sri. 'M.' Showing his Handwriting

If Ramakrishna attracted bhadrakok through his 'Otherness' [the fact that he was rustic and not urban], this was to a considerable extent an Other constructed by the bhadrakok themselves. There is no direct written testimony left by the saint: we know about him only from bhadrakok disciples and admirers, and the texts they composed simultaneously illuminate—and transform. ... on the whole it is not a perhaps unapproachable 'original' Ramakrishna-by-himself, but Ramakrishna as constituted in the gaze of the late-nineteenth-century bhadrakok, who is of central importance in any exploration of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition (285–6).

The problem with such arguments is the following: It is true that from the *Kathamrita* we

can glean the subjective positions of the diarist Mahendranath Gupta as well, and by no means was he a person oblivious of political and social realities. However, the fact that M. 'framed' Sri Ramakrishna's teachings with his own explanations, descriptions, comparisons with European philosophy and Hindu scriptures, and more importantly explanatory titles does not still take away the claim of authenticity on his part in representing *verbatim* the sayings of the Master. It is well-known that Sri Ramakrishna himself had taken an interest in M.'s notes and even at times verified if he had understood and recorded correctly. Clearly, the Master was aware of it and approved M.'s content occasionally, therefore, it is difficult to argue that M. misunderstood or

distorted his sayings by supplying his own meanings. We do see Sri Ramakrishna *through* M., but this in itself does not prove that we are seeing a distorted image. Moreover, there have been several other authors and devotees who have represented the Master—largely in a similar light. Then is Sri Ramakrishna, the way we know him, a product of a subjective construction by a large group of people who are so silently complicit in this project that it never appears as make-believe? Let us not let our imagination run riot.

What most scholars have ignored is that M. himself was a spiritual aspirant. The word ‘devotee’ often conveys the impression of a static state of affairs, whereas a devotee or a spiritual seeker is one who goes through a dynamic process of transformation—often even a rapid one at certain points of time—and a first-hand engagement with spiritual ideas and teachers. Hence, the choice of comparisons and theoretical frameworks that M. makes is informed by his own position—not merely social, but intellectual and spiritual—vis-à-vis the Ramakrishna phenomenon. Secondly, if one raises the question of meanings as generated by representational contexts, I would say that M. had structured the text and incorporated his own elements in such a way that it is possible for the reader to distinguish between his own addition and Ramakrishna’s sayings. Hence, it is possible for a reader to ignore the embellishments and refer to the essential only. Incidentally, I, for instance, while reading the *Kathamrita* for my personal purposes, have never paid much attention to M.’s embellishments, and, given the structure of the text, it was possible for me to ignore them. While it is true that many a reading is likely to be informed by M.’s structural interventions, an independent reading is not altogether impossible, if one so desires.

One difference between Chatterjee’s and Sarkar’s positions is that in the former,

Ramakrishna is almost missing, while the latter takes on board the issue of Ramakrishna’s own agency in the ‘construction’ of this cult of ‘Otherness’. Sarkar argues that Ramakrishna had an ambivalent attitude towards persons of a class, superior by virtue of wealth and power. Furthermore: ‘Subservience and resentment ... jostle at the heart of Ramakrishna’s central conception of bhakti, with divinity at times patterned by him on the model of the baramanush patron in a relationship that was acceptable but not tension-free’ (295). And this Ishvara as ‘*baramanush*’, according to Sarkar, is an idealised, traditional figure that is in sharp contrast to the ‘impersonal, distant office boss’. Resentment? Did we read it right? Perhaps nothing could be farther from truth about Ramakrishna’s conception of divinity. True, he did evoke the *baramanush* image quite often, but the predominant motif of God-devotee relationship in his teachings was that of mother and child—an endearing relationship that is completely tension-free.

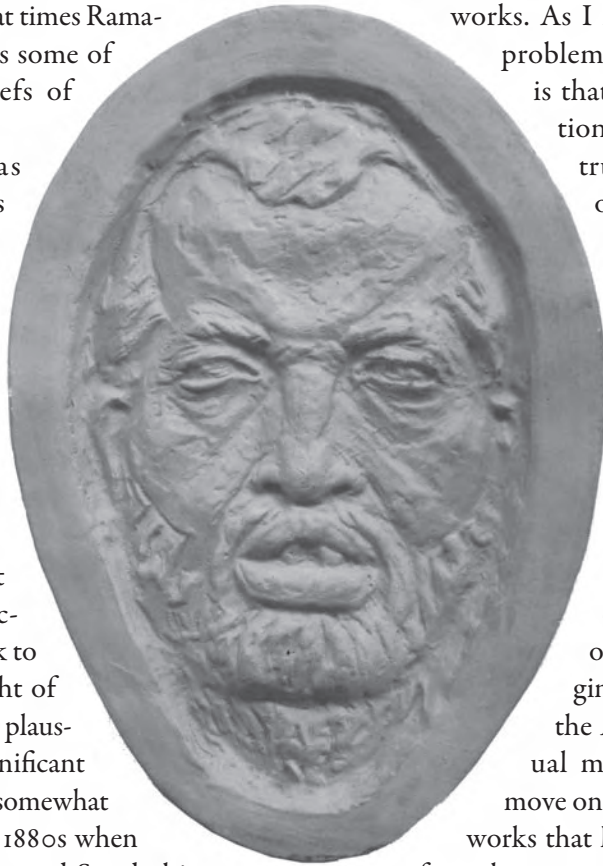
The issue of Ramakrishna’s own agency in the process of the formation of the tradition around him was taken up more explicitly by Sen. He criticises this ‘somewhat formulaic presentation of Ramakrishna as a captive of a middle-class discourse in colonial Calcutta’ and writes: ‘All through the *Kathamrita* there runs a spiritual quest or urgency that cannot be mistaken for the testimony of a politically embattled middle class. It appears absurdly reductionist to suggest that this class, bereft of much hope in a grossly unequal world, was primarily attracted to Ramakrishna’s recurring references to the “illusory” nature of this world and worldly relations.’<sup>9</sup> He also

**A**s long as you do not feel that God is the Master, you must come back to the world, you must be born again and again. There will be no rebirth when you can truly say, ‘O God, Thou art the Master.’ —*Gospel*, 308.

rightly points out that at times Ramakrishna even overturns some of the deep-seated beliefs of middle-class devotees.

After R K Das Gupta,<sup>10</sup> Sen provides a history of the text *Kathamrita* in one of his works, where he underscores the fact that while M.'s jottings dated back to the 1880s, the actual literary production of the text did not begin before 1902, that is, it took almost two decades for the entire work to come out.<sup>11</sup> In the light of this history, Sen finds it plausible that there was 'a significant interplay between two somewhat different periods;--the 1880s when the jottings were made and Swadeshi Bengal when these evolved as a full-blown text' (32). According to him, the 'interest in comparative religion or philosophy [that M evinces] or in the 'universalist thesis' in general, is really more true of the 1920s and 1930s than it is of the 1880s ... in the process of transliterating his diary notes, Gupta simultaneously brings into play the cultural sensitivities of two somewhat different time-periods' (51). Sen, however, qualifies that the absence of the manuscript of M's diary notes makes it difficult for us to ascertain this, yet it is an informed conjecture.

So, one aspect that binds Chatterjee's and Sarkar's works together is the emphasis—perhaps overemphasis—on the middle class. This point about the middle class has been made earlier too, both in general as well as academic



works. As I mentioned earlier, the problem with such arguments is that they are quite reductionist. There is a grain of truth about the malaise of the colonial middle class and the comfort that Ramakrishna's teachings might have provided to that. However, to exaggerate that factor is also to distort the complete picture. These works—although perhaps justified in their own place—somehow obfuscate or at least marginalise the real purport of the *Kathamrita*—its spiritual message. We shall now move onto that—a discussion of works that have examined the text from the perspective of religious studies.

### ***Of Bhakti, Tantra, Vijnana, and Vedanta***

In spite of the rich body of literature on Sri Ramakrishna's ideas, we do not yet have a single comprehensive academic work<sup>12</sup> on the *Kathamrita* that engages with all aspects of its philosophical, spiritual, and religious ideas. There is not even any agreement among scholars as to the 'category'—Vedantin, Tantric, Bhakta, and so on—in which they can smoothly fit Sri Ramakrishna. In a sense, the attempt to 'fit' Sri Ramakrishna into any category is absurd in the first place. He himself is the chameleon and the cloth-dyer, whose stories he recounts; he cannot be pinned down to any *one* classification. The best description so far seems to be Vivekananda's exclamation to Swami Yogananda—'*anantabhavamaya*



*thakur*’<sup>13</sup>—infinite are his *bhavas*, he cannot be limited to any boundaries.

Perhaps the great spiritual power of Sri Ramakrishna lies in the very fact of him being able to attract minds and temperaments of different kinds. If one analyses the profiles and lives of his direct disciples, one discerns the sheer diversity of his spiritual companions. Hence, Holy Mother’s statement is incisive, that in previous incarnations, all *bhavas*—spiritual ideals—existed, but there was emphasis on only one or some *bhavas*, and the others got suppressed; but in Sri Ramakrishna, one witnesses a full play of all the diverse spiritual moods and attitudes.<sup>14</sup> This point has been made too often that he was truly an embodiment of harmony of different paths; but this realization is yet to sink in academic works that seek to classify him as *either* this *or* that. The other extreme, however, is equally dangerous—to claim that he was an incoherent admixture of everything, and hence, nothing in particular. Fortunately, the debate on his religious pluralism and universalism has matured and become sophisticated in the last one decade, at least in the discipline of religious studies proper, although there is little reflection of this in the social sciences.

The most enduring debate in academia around Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings is whether he was a Vedantin or not. A very commonplace and, I think, now dated idea is that Ramakrishna was essentially a simple *bhakta*. In the book *Philosophies of India*, by the famous German Indologist, Heinrich Zimmer, Ramakrishna is discussed in the chapter on Tantra. Of course, the most obvious reason for classifying Ramakrishna thus is the importance of *shakti* in his scheme of things. Apart from that, for our purposes here, the following remark is particularly significant: ‘Both the Tantra and popular Hinduism accept the truth of Advaita Vedānta but shift the accent to the positive aspect of *māyā*. The world is the

unending manifestation of the dynamic aspect of the divine, and as such should not be devaluated and discarded as suffering and imperfection, but celebrated, penetrated by enlightening insight, and experienced with understanding.’<sup>15</sup> Walter Neevel goes as far as suggesting that ‘Rāmakrishna is an advaitin but ... his non-dualism must be viewed from the perspective of a tantric *advaita*, not that of Śāṅkara.’<sup>16</sup> In support of this argument Neevel cites T M P Mahadevan distinguishing between Shaktism and Advaita on account of their divergent positions regarding the status of *māyā*—‘for Śāṅkara *māyā* is the principle of illusion veiling the real *Brahman* and projecting the non-real world, for Śāktism it is a real power really manifesting itself in the form of the variegated universe ... for [Śaktism] the process of the One becoming the Many is real, whereas it is not so for [Advaita].’<sup>17</sup>

Nalini Devdas’s book, which is more than fifty years old now, identifies *vijnana* as the core concept of Ramakrishna’s spiritual teachings. For her, he was predominantly a *vijnani*, rather than being a simple *bhakta* or *jnani*. Devdas understands *vijnana* in Sri Ramakrishna as ‘mature bhakti’ and ‘fuller knowledge’. *Vijnana* is the state of fulfillment for both—whether the aspirant has taken to the path of *bhakti* or of *jnana*. Devdas also underscores the centrality of direct spiritual experience in Ramakrishna. However, she takes the diametrically opposite position to that of Zimmer, and argues that Ramakrishna’s teachings about the supreme *brahman* is closer to Advaita than to Tantra.<sup>18</sup> Curious, how the teachings of the same person can evoke such diametrically opposite views! Perhaps it reminds us once again of Ramakrishna’s chameleon!

**M**an becomes pure by repeating the name of God. Therefore one should practise the chanting of God’s name.  
—Gospel, 309.

According to Ayon Maharaj, Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy 'is best characterised as "Vijñāna Vedānta", a resolutely nonsectarian philosophy—rooted in the spiritual experience of what Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa calls "*vijñāna*"—that harmonizes various apparently conflicting religious faiths, sectarian philosophies, and spiritual disciplines. From Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa's expansive spiritual standpoint of *vijñāna*, God is both personal and impersonal, both with and without form, both immanent in the universe and beyond it.'<sup>19</sup> He argues that 'the concept of *vijñāna* provides the unifying framework for interpreting and synthesizing Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa's philosophical views on the scope of reason, the nature of God, the relationship between Brahman and Śakti, the ontological status of the universe, the different stages in spiritual experience, and the harmony of religious and spiritual paths' (28). He identifies six features of what he construes as Sri Ramakrishna's Vijnana Vedanta. For explaining Vivekananda's pluralistic Vedanta, Ayon Maharaj agrees with and borrows Satis Chandra Chatterjee's expression 'samanvayi vedanta',<sup>20</sup> but in the case of Ramakrishna, while he agrees with the syncretic aspect, he chooses to call the latter Vijnana Vedanta, thereby foregrounding *vijnana*.

According to Jeffery Long, 'The Ramakrishna tradition sees itself as a synthesis of all the previous forms of Hinduism—and ultimately of all religions—which it presents as so many varied paths to a common destination of liberation from the process of rebirth. This tradition is also known as Ramakrishna Vedānta ...'<sup>21</sup> I have not come across any other scholar using the expression 'Ramakrishna Vedanta', and perhaps this is the best way to express it, as it does not require any external referents.

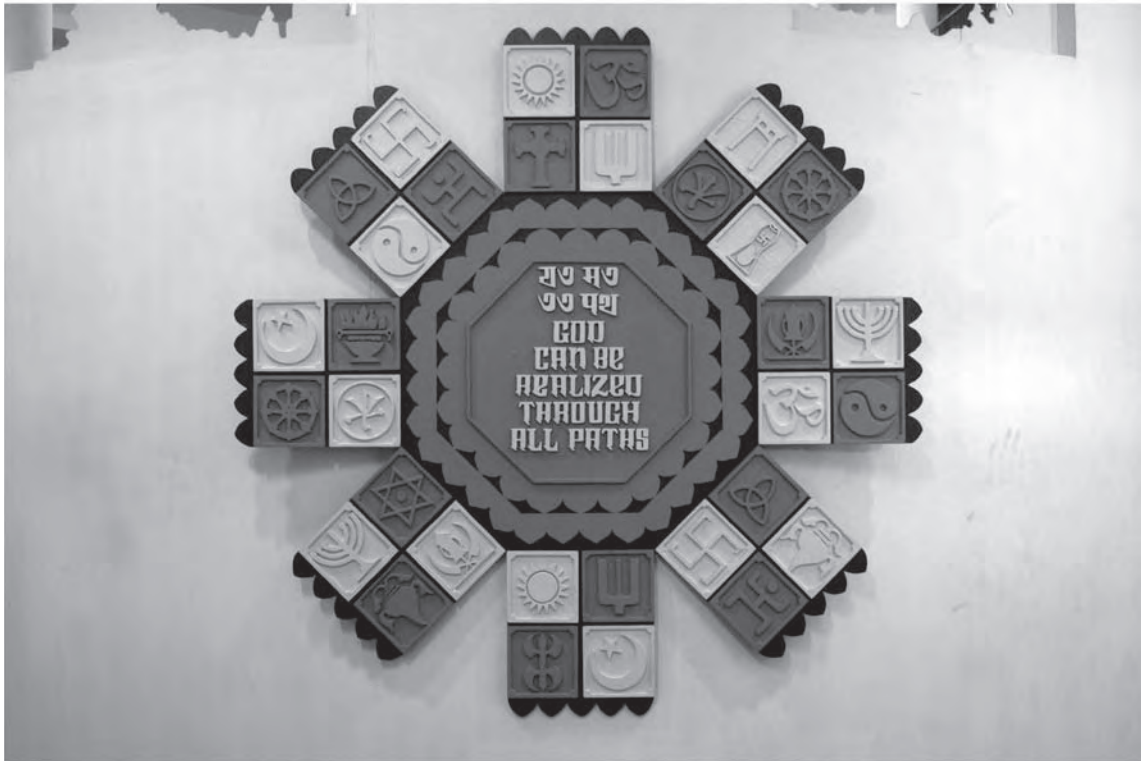
Long accepts the appellation 'Neo-Vedanta' for the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition, and according to him, it has two predominant

characteristics—one, the emphasis on direct spiritual experience; and two, religious pluralism.<sup>22</sup> Devdas, Long, Arvind Sharma,<sup>23</sup> and perhaps others too harp on the importance accorded to direct experience in the teachings of Ramakrishna. They are right in highlighting this. But, without going into the debate on scriptural authority versus direct experience, I simply wish to state briefly that direct spiritual experience is the call of all true spirituality—the Upanishads unfailingly call us to *experience* for ourselves the truth they represent.

Satis Chandra Chatterjee had proposed the concept of '*samanvayi vedanta*' to explain Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy, which, according to Chatterjee, was 'a synthesis of all schools of the Vedanta.'<sup>24</sup> The emphasis on *samanvaya* or harmony is in tune with Sri Ramakrishna's own understanding of things. Interestingly, Devdas cites P N Srinivasachari, who described Ramakrishna's teaching as '*anubhavadvaita*', that is, *advaita* based on *anubhava*—experience.<sup>25</sup> Devdas continues to explain: 'Sri Ramakrishna did not attach himself to any particular system, nor did he rely on logical reasoning. His aim was the direct experience of Truth. Whenever he turns to any system of philosophy, Advaita, Visistadvaita or Tantra, he studied it from the point of view of his own experience. This experience of Brahman is the central basis and the point of reference.'<sup>26</sup>

Amiya Sen remarks:

In his attempt to project him [Ramakrishna] as a uniquely syncretic figure, Swami Saradananda in his *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprosongo* argued that Ramakrishna preached the Vedantic ideas of Ramanuja and Madhva alongside those of Sankara. That this is philosophically quite untenable apparently escaped the Swami. In truth, there seems to be very little meeting-ground between the acute monism of Sankara and the dualism of Madhva ... Perhaps, the *Lilaprosongo* would have been closer to the mark



had it suggested instead that Sri Ramakrishna borrowed ideas across Vedantic schools without being sensitive to the problems of their reconciliation. ... Scholars of philosophy like Satish Chandra Chatterji were obviously aware of the inner incompatibility of such random borrowing but chose the escapist route of phrasing an altogether novel term ‘*Samanvaya* (syncretist) Vedanta’ to overcome this problem.<sup>27</sup>

What escaped Sen, however, is the fact that the ideas of the different schools of Vedanta might be incompatible philosophically, but they are not incompatible experientially, and this is precisely what Ramakrishna even demonstrated. His was not a case of ‘borrowing,’ but of experiencing. Let us take the example of the famous Hanuman citation from the *Gospel*, which Ramakrishna repeats a number of times: ‘Once Rama asked Hanuman, “How do you look on Me?” And Hanuman replied: “O Rama, as long as I have the feeling of ‘I, I see that Thou art the

whole and I am a part; Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant. But when, O Rama, I have the knowledge of Truth, then I realize that Thou art I, and I am Thou’.”<sup>28</sup> Again, elsewhere, he said: ‘No one else is here, and you are my own people. Let me tell you something. I have come to the final realization that God is the Whole and I am a part of Him, that God is the Master and I am His servant. Furthermore, I think every now and then that He is I and I am He’ (572). In these utterances, Sri Ramakrishna articulated three distinct *bhavas*—all of which are equally true. The *bhava* of master and servant is dualist, that

**W**hy do I ask you to think of God and chant His name in solitude? Living in the world day and night, one suffers from worries. Haven’t you noticed brother killing brother for a foot of land? The Sikhs said to me, ‘The cause of all worry and confusion is these three: land, woman, and money!’ —*Gospel*, 310.



of part and whole represents qualified non-dualism, and of course, the last one is non-dualist. Through his spiritual experiences, Ramakrishna did harmonise these three different approaches, which otherwise appear contradictory through mere intellection.

Devdas aptly cites from Saradananda, where he quotes Ramakrishna as saying: 'Know that the non-dual state of consciousness is the ultimate one to be realized; it is a realization that is beyond mind and speech. The states up to qualified non-dualism only can be understood by mind and intellect and expressed in words. In that state both the absolute and the relative are equally eternal. The Lord Himself, His name and His abode—are of pure consciousness.'<sup>29</sup> Let us note that Ramakrishna or Saradananda refer to these phenomena as 'states of consciousness'. This clearly indicates that Ramakrishna was talking about his spiritual *experience*, and not about pure metaphysics. Devdas had made quite an incisive remark in a different context: '... Sri Ramakrishna interprets the statement: "All religions are paths that lead to the same goal" existentially, not metaphysically' (107). Although made in a different context, it fits quite well here.

In a way, it is possible to connect *vijnana* with the fact of direct experience, on the one hand, and with Vedanta, on the other. One can be a *vijnani* only when one has had a direct experience of divinity. The transcendent-immanent dyad of *vijnana* is in consonance with Vedanta as expressed in the Upanishads, which in the same breath admits of both transcendence and immanence. Whether it is Tantra (Zimmer) or *vijnana* (Devdas, Ayon Maharaj)—the point is clear that in Sri Ramakrishna one discerns a strong emphasis on the immanent aspect of Godhead. The second aspect that emerges is the fact of direct spiritual experience. And partly from that, flow syncretism and religious pluralism, to

which we turn in the following and concluding section of the essay.

### **Religious pluralism and universalism**

Religious pluralism is the hallmark of Sri Ramakrishna and almost all scholars agree that he was indeed a great pluralist. But while all agree in this regard, the exact nature of his pluralism is still subject to disagreement. As pointed out by Ayon Maharaj, the debate on Sri Ramakrishna's religious pluralism has been mainly around 'precisely *how* Sri Ramakrishna harmonized the various religions and spiritual philosophies.'<sup>30</sup> According to him, there have been three broad trends in interpreting Ramakrishna's pluralistic ideas. One set of interpretations looks upon Ramakrishna as a radical universalist, for whom all religions were essentially the *same*. Another set considers his ideas from a 'sectarian' standpoint, in claiming that Ramakrishna harmonised all spiritual paths *from the standpoint* of Advaita or Shaktism, for instance. Ayon Maharaj agrees with the third set of interpretations, which claim that 'Sri Ramakrishna's religious pluralism stems from his capacious and resolutely nonsectarian conception of God as the Infinite Reality that is both personal and impersonal, and both with and without form' (182). Chief proponents of this third view are Satis Chandra Chatterjee, Swami Tapasyananda, and Jeffery Long.

Ayon Maharaj discusses the threefold model of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, which is actually derived from the history of Christian theology, and places Sri Ramakrishna in the pluralist paradigm, which accepts the salvific potential of all religions, without privileging any one as a superior means over and above the others. Jeffery Long compares Sri Ramakrishna's ideas with Jain *Anekantavada* on the one hand, and with the 'process theology' of Alfred N Whitehead, on the other, to demonstrate how it is possible to



PAINTING: HANUMAN BOWING DOWN TO SRI RAMA AND SITA / ARTIST UNKNOWN

conceive of apparently contradictory yet simultaneously valid positions vis-à-vis the different levels of Reality, as well as perspectives on it.<sup>31</sup> More importantly, this approach demonstrates how this kind of differently-conceived paradigm of inclusivism exists in other religious traditions as well.

According to Ayon Maharaj, 'the Advaitin hegemonically imposes the goal of realizing *nirguna* Brahman onto all the world religions' (190), while Sri Ramakrishna never privileged the *nirguna* over the *saguna*. It is true that Ramakrishna never privileged *nirguna* Brahman over *saguna* Brahman. In fact, he always emphasised upon the fact that Shakti and Brahman are one, *leela* and *nitya* are one, the immanent and the transcendent are one. If they are *one*, then the question of privileging any one over the other does not arise at all. At the same time, it should be noted that he had stated unequivocally that without the 'knowledge of Advaita', it is not possible to attain *caitanya*.<sup>32</sup> How do we then reconcile these two positions?

It seems to me that there is actually no

contradiction between these two positions. The problem lies in the very framework of understanding Advaita as a 'sectarian' approach of hegemonically imposing the primacy of *nirguna* Brahman. I would like to argue that Sri Ramakrishna is Vedantic, but his Vedanta does not preclude Tantra or bhakti or other paths; that he is Advaitic, but his advaita is not any 'school of thought', but a principle and an experience. Nor is his *advaita* an exclusivist principle that admits only of the *nirguna* aspect of Brahman, and not the *saguna*. Whether this position is similar to or different from that of the proponents of the Advaita 'school' of Vedanta—Acharya Shankara mainly and others—requires a separate

When the heart becomes pure through the practice of spiritual discipline, then one rightly feels that God alone is the Doer. He alone has become mind, life, and intelligence. We are only His instruments. Thou it is that holdest the elephant in the mire; Thou, that helpst the lame man scale the loftiest hill. —*Gospel*, 311.

study. But certainly, both Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda are closer to the Vedanta represented in the Upanishads than to any exclusive school of thought.

Secondly, what about the so-called pantheistic or panentheistic formulations of oneness, as expressed even in the bhakti traditions? They are *advaitic* nonetheless, as they talk about oneness. We also examined above cases where scholars argue for a tantra-based *advaita* in Sri Ramakrishna. Hence, 'Advaita' need not be understood exclusively in terms of the school of thought that goes by the name of Shankara, although there are similarities between the teachings of this particular school and those of Sri Ramakrishna as well. *Samanvayi* Vedanta is indeed a nice way to describe Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. But, he not only harmonised the various strands within Vedanta, but with equal ease, he harmonised Vedanta and Tantra, Vedanta and *bhakti*, while this harmonization was very much grounded in the fundamental principles of *santana dharma*.

As Arvind Sharma points out: 'In Rāmākṣṇa we encounter the paradox of a person who did not believe in a universal religion, but who, at the same time, was a religious universalist—who believed that all human beings will be saved!'<sup>33</sup> According to Sharma, Ramakrishna is perhaps the most significant phenomenon in modern Hinduism with regard to the concept of universal religion. Sharma beautifully summarises the main elements of religious universalism in Ramakrishna. Universalism in him does not mean sameness. Secondly, while all paths are valid, all paths are not valid *for* all. So, the correct approach as shown by Ramakrishna is not renouncing one's own path, and at the same time not denouncing those of others. Diversity is the design of the universe; hence, one religion or even one particular path *will not* suit all. Sharma

also points out the difference in position from the respective standpoints of the *sādhaka*—the aspirant—and the *siddha*—the realised one.

I would like to conclude with one of Devdas's observations:

This statement that all paths lead to the same goal needs careful interpretation. No path leads all the way to the goal. There is a point at which every particular religion with its creed and ritual must be abandoned, for the goal is a direct experience transcending theological discussions and religious creeds and symbols. To use a favourite analogy in the Indian tradition, the religion that the *sādhaka* has chosen is a ferry in which, with others he crosses the waters of *samsāra*. But there is a point at which he must leave the ferry and leap alone to reach the shore ... Only those who have taken the leap know without a shadow of doubt that the shore is the same for all.<sup>34</sup>

The spiritual realm of Sri Ramakrishna is well beyond all sectarian frameworks, doctrinal disputes (including some in which yours truly herself might have indulged), and of course, religious differences—a point where all the great souls meet, on the shore of Realization, the twilight zone of the finite and the Infinite. ❧

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## ***Sri Ramakrishna's Message to Humanity***

**Gopal Stavig**

**T**HE CREATIVITY OF a Ramakrishna is so unexpected and unique that it was basically unpredictable. There are two forms of history: sacred and secular, with some interaction

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between them. 'Sacred History' is not easy to forecast, since it involves divine beings taking human birth and teaching their message to a large segment of humanity. The details of God's plan of liberation are obviously unknown to us humans. It manifests through the life's work of Sri Rama,

Sri Krishna, Moses, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muhammad, Sri Chaitanya, Sri Ramakrishna, and others. Through the grace of the Lord, it is the history of God's special revelatory and regenerative action in the world performed to fulfill a special religious mission. It is unique and different from the history in general, in that the events which compose it represent the direct intervention and displeasure of a manifestation of God in the world. After which it progresses and is preserved by other people. Sri Ramakrishna was concerned almost entirely with the sacred history when discussing the life events of Rama, Krishna, and Chaitanya and their companions, but seldom with the secular history. He lived in the 'City of God' rather than in the 'City of the World'. Ramakrishna showed little or no interest in contemporary Indian historical events concerning the current Governor-General or Viceroy, various wars, or in the major political activities and legal changes that occurred at that time.

Sri Ramakrishna represents a new Self-revelation of God. He came for two purposes, to prepare people for liberation and to make it a better world. In doing so he created a new paradigm, a new way of viewing and understanding the world around us. A uniqueness of his method is that first he would practice a discipline and then attain his religious goal. Only after reaching the goal would he teach others how to attain it. His talks are stated with great clarity as compared to the philosophers and theologians who tend to make things complicated. He teaches in two ways, by his life example and through ideas presented in a homely manner. Being divinely gifted, as vehicles of profound thought he uses analogies, metaphors, parables, and illustrations taken from his daily life, describing scenes that are easily recognised and understood by most people. His language is simple, frank, direct, and rustic. His words have spiritual power and force that learned and intellectual men

are lacking. Why, because he is the embodiment of his sublime teachings, he taught the highest principles and lived by them. Ramakrishna has a decided preference for concrete rather than abstract statements. He deals with facts and descriptions concerning everyday tangible objects. Concrete terms refer to objects and events available to the senses, which are clearer and easier to understand than abstractions. He is far more interested in explaining to people how to attain the highest reality, than in giving philosophical dissertations on the nature of this Reality.

Ramakrishna has the advantage over other Avatars, of being preceded by a long religious and philosophical tradition over many millenniums, combining both scriptures—Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, and so on, and their commentaries by sages like Acharya Shankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva. At its origin, Christianity had the Old Testament but the religion centers on the New Testament. Buddhism and Islam pretty much originated with Buddha and Muhammad without much important prior literature.

Swami Abhedananda emphasised his uniqueness and originality.

He reached the goal of all religions, not by following the path that was laid down by any religious prophet or spiritual teacher of any country, but by following a path which was original and untrodden by any of the Saviours of

**T**here is a big difference between a scholar and a holy man. The mind of a mere scholar is fixed on 'woman and gold', but the sadhu's mind is on the Lotus Feet of Hari. A scholar says one thing and does another. But it is quite a different matter with a sadhu. The words and actions of a man who has given his mind to the Lotus Feet of God are altogether different.

—*Gospel*, 296.



the world. ... Every idea which he gave was fresh from above and unadulterated by the product of human intellect, culture, or scholastic education. Each step of his life from babyhood to the last moment was extraordinary.<sup>1</sup>

Ramakrishna followed the *meliozem partem*—the best part— method by evaluating other religious groups within and outside of Hinduism in the best possible light. This is in contrast to *pejorem partem*—the worst—which is judging other religious practices and ideas from the worst possible standpoint.

His many contributions include:

1) Possibly the most revolutionary aspect of Ramakrishna's teachings is that even in this

materialistic age a large majority of the people of the world should strive to manifest their innate Divinity and attempt to realise the living presence of God, while living on earth and not wait for a post-mortem existence. The practice of meditative yoga opens up a whole new inner world for its practitioners. Spiritual experience is not just for the religious professional; it is for all people, to varying degrees, who seriously and dedicatedly seek it. Of course, the higher forms of realization are attained by those who are pure in heart, chaste, and who can devote their whole heart and soul to God for spiritual realization alone, and not for any material gain. Ramakrishna indicated, 'The goal of human life is to



PAINTING: RATAN ACHARYA

realize God.<sup>2</sup> 'What is required is heart, intense hankering, sincere longing for God. When, to a person, life without God is unbearable, then alone God reveals himself to that soul' (ibid.). 'There are certain signs of God-realization. The man in whom longing for God manifests its glories is not far from attaining Him'.<sup>3</sup> 'If the devotee but once feels this attachment and ecstatic love for God, this mature devotion and longing, then he sees God in both His aspects, with form and without form' (173). A large number of people meditating on a daily basis is certainly for the benefit of society and could bring about a major transformation in the social order.

Ramakrishna wants more people to focus their thoughts, feelings, activities, and volitions on the inner mystical realm contemplating the eternal God as the true reality, value, and goal of life. They should interpret the world around them as Spirit from the standpoint of a system of spiritual values. The goal is not to seek sensory pleasures that yield only temporary satisfaction, but to be concentrated on union with God. Transient material values are to be renounced by withdrawing from them and replacing them with supersensory happiness. Any attempt to undermine the devotee's spiritual values should be resisted. Human birth is a blessing because it provides the opportunity that leads the devotee to self-development and a higher realm of existence. The world is to be treated as a means to a higher world—*loka*—rather than as an end in itself. Meditative practices include self-control with the mind focused on understanding modifying, controlling, and mastering the inner life and self. Techniques are employed to gain intuitive cognition of the nature of the mind and its inner psychological and mental processes. An integrated religious life includes meditation, activity, and study of the highest order. The ultimate authority that underlies this approach to life is God and not the state,

legal system, physical force, or economic interests.

Vivekananda expressed it this way,

This is the message of Shri Ramakrishna to the modern world: 'Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality; and the more that this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticise no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realisation. Only those can understand who have felt. Only those that have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light.' ...

Therefore, my Master's message to mankind is 'Be spiritual and realise truth for yourself.'<sup>4</sup>

2) Ramakrishna taught according to his words and life that to attain our spiritual goal concentrated effort is necessary. We must perform some form of *sadhana*, spiritual disciplines that require renunciation and asceticism. Certain moral practices must be followed.

To set an example Ramakrishna's life was entirely devoted to the pursuit of religious experience and superconscious communion. His whole existence was perfectly concentrated on a single-pointed thrust toward the Divine, sacrificing everything to attain that goal. He was a living verification that within every person without exception there is a hidden source of superconscious realization that can be tapped and manifested. He believed that each person is Divine and the task of religion is to help each individual

Spiritual practice with a view to winning a lawsuit and earning money, or to helping others win in court and acquire property, shows a very mean understanding.

—Gospel, 285.

to recognise or realise this fact.

Ramakrishna's method of attaining knowledge was grounded not in abstract thought, but in 'immediate experience'. This is a unifying experience that combines the manifold aspects of direct perception, knowing, feeling, will, and joy in one single event. Then one comes into direct contact with the higher reality. God and the Divine are realised not as an intellectual abstraction, in which the real is chopped up into fragmented parts. The 'given' is directly known. Concerning metaphysics and religious practices he did not hold rigid dogmatic beliefs that would turn one person or group against another.

3) For Ramakrishna, God is omnipresent and not 'wholly other' existing only in some far away realm. Because God pervades everything and is the spiritual Reality behind it, He can be realised through religious experience. He told his devotees, "There are three classes of devotees. The lowest one says, "God is up there". That is, he points to heaven. The mediocre devotee says that God dwells in the heart as the "Inner Controller". But the highest devotee says: "God alone has become everything. All that we perceive is so many forms of God."<sup>5</sup>

4) He proclaimed the religion of the worship of the Deities. He received the visitation of Shiva, Vishnu, Kali, and Durga in addition to Rama, Sita, Hanuman, Krishna, Radha, Jesus, possibly Muhammad, Chaitanya, and Nityananda. Previously many people in the world considered these teachings to be mythological. He placed great

emphasis on the worship of the Divine Mother of the universe. This idea is now being spread to countries where the worship of God as feminine was previously unknown and unpracticed. Ramakrishna would sit for hours singing hymns and talking and praying to the image of Kali in the shrine as a child to his mother.

Swami Abhedananda affirmed,

Ramakrishna taught that every woman, old or young, was the representative of the Divine Mother on earth. He worshipped God as the Mother of the Universe, and the Divine Mother, as he often used to say, showed him that all women represented the Divine Motherhood on earth. For the first time in the religious history of the world, this idea was preached by a Divine Incarnation ... Up to the last moment of his earthly career the Bhagavan was absolutely pure, chaste, and a perfect child of his Divine Mother of the Universe.<sup>6</sup>

Ramakrishna stressed that, 'Women are so many forms of my Divine Mother. ... You are all images of the Mother of the Universe.'<sup>7</sup> 'He who has realized God ... perceives clearly that women are but so many aspects of the Divine Mother. He worships them all as the Mother Herself' (168). 'All women are so many forms of the Divine Mother. But Her manifestation is greatest in pure-souled virgins' (393). 'One must show the highest respect to one's mother, for she is the very embodiment of the Blissful Mother of the Universe' (448). His wife was his first disciple, whom he worshiped as the living embodiment of the goddess Kali, the Divine Mother. Coming under his influence some women became saints of a high order.

In the West, contemporary feminist theologians have been struggling with the patriarchal nature of religions that consider God only as Father and the Divine Incarnation only as male.<sup>8</sup> They believe that Mother Goddess worship and imagery embodies a new power for women, partially expressed through the modern women's

I am not asking you to give up all of the 'I'. You should give up only the 'unripe I'. The 'unripe I' makes one feel: 'I am the doer. These are my wife and children. I am a teacher.' Renounce this 'unripe I' and keep the 'ripe I', which will make you feel that you are the servant of God, His devotee, and that God is the Doer and you are His instrument.

—Gospel, 269.





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liberation movement. Not only the maleness, but also the femaleness of the Supreme Being should be deified. The Goddess symbolises the creativity, strength, and beauty manifesting through women. The Vedanta of Sri Ramakrishna teaches that God also manifests as Mother, and his chaste wife Holy Mother is revered as a female Divine Incarnation—Avatar.

5) In some medieval Advaitic texts, there is a tendency to attempt to go directly from the world to Nirguna Brahman—the Absolute, which is too big a burden for most people. Ramakrishna said, ‘It is only because there is the Relative that you can

transcend it step by step and reach the Absolute.’<sup>9</sup> One reaches the roof by ascending a ladder step by step. And this is just what Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Vivekananda and his brother disciples supplied, those missing steps that lead to the roof.

6) Ramakrishna respected all of the major religions of the world and considered them if properly followed as different paths to God. Swami Vivekananda’s insight is, ‘To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions was the mission of my Master. Other teachers have taught special religions which bear their names, but this great teacher of

the nineteenth century made no claim for himself. He left every religion undisturbed because he had realised that in reality, they are all part and parcel of one eternal religion.<sup>10</sup> He accepted the a-cosmic Non-dualistic, pantheistic/panentheistic Qualified Non-dualistic, and theistic Dualistic paths to God along with all four yogas.

His method of proof was totally unique and absolutely valid. Other people have preached religious pluralism and tolerance, but none attained the highest spiritual realization by practicing the disciplines of many diverse forms of Hinduism—Tantra, Vaishnava, Advaita Vedanta—along with Christianity and Islam. By deeply penetrating into the great religions, he discovered that all religions properly practiced ultimately lead to God

consciousness. He sought mutual respect not only for non-Indian religions but also between each of the Indian denominations and sects.

7) His message is universalistic. Vivekananda mentioned that Ramakrishna came to earth 'for the good of the whole human race ... and for the good of humanity' (3.315–6). Ramakrishna told Holy Mother, 'I felt I was in a far-off country where people were of fair complexion. They were different from us and spoke a language I could not understand. As I was wondering about the vision, the Divine Mother revealed to me they too would follow my teachings. How sincere their devotion was!'<sup>11</sup> He said he 'would have many devotees among the white people'.<sup>12</sup> Some people might think of Ramakrishna as a Hindu but the

message and principles he presents in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* are universal, meant for religious devotees of all countries.

R B Rybakov, deputy director at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russia Academy of Sciences in Moscow, affirmed, 'the prophetic teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda are of universal import and of great moral worth for the whole of humanity. Transcending the barriers of political frontiers and time, these ideas are bound to be embraced sooner or later by all the people of the earth



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seeking to reach the realm of truth—irrespective of their caste, creed, colour, sex, social standing, or religion and other doctrinal beliefs.<sup>13</sup>

Father Francis X Clooney, SJ, a Catholic Jesuit Priest and a Professor of Comparative Theology at Harvard University Divinity School revealed, 'Ramakrishna can tell us a great deal about the future of world religion, if we listen to him—and, even better, do as he did; I, for one, have learned much from him—about Hinduism, but also about Christ and being a Christian.'<sup>14</sup>

Ramakrishna taught and practiced what Pitirim Sorokin (1889–1968) called the Ideational [Spiritual, Sacred] Religion. He wrote, 'Ideational truth is indeed the truth revealed by the grace of God through his mouthpieces (the prophets, mystics, oracles, and founders of religion), disclosed in the supersensory way through mystic experience, direct revelation, divine intuition, and inspiration. ... Ideational science, philosophy, and religion are concerned primarily with supersensory reality and values. The basic truth of the ideational system is that of its religion ... It is engrossed in the supersensory world, dedicated to the eternal varieties, in contradistinction to the temporal truth of the senses.'<sup>15</sup> Ideational society consists of sacred: behaviour, buildings, deities, history, holy persons, language, locations and pilgrimages, music, objects that are venerated, religious scripture, ritual, time and holy days, tradition, and worship.

Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples came to bring about a revolutionary change in world culture. Today we live in a relatively advanced secular society. In the future Ideational spirituality and mysticism will combine into a harmonious synthesis with the best of the higher secular culture creating a new worldwide Integral culture. These events are occurring at this time in history, recognised by those people who have the insight to understand their development.<sup>16</sup>



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Once a meeting was called to decide which of the two deities, Siva or Brahma, was the greater. Unable to come to any decision, the pundits at last referred the matter to Padmalochan. With characteristic guilelessness he said: 'How do I know? Neither I nor any of my ancestors back to the fourteenth generation have seen Siva or Brahma.'

—*Gospel*, 267.





***Sri Ramakrishna's Sadhana:  
A Perennial Pushpaka Vimana***

**Prof. M Sivaramkrishna**

THE WORD *pushpaka* means 'That which shines like a beautiful flower'. And whether the science of aeronautics was known to the ancient Hindus or not *pushpaka* or *pushpak vimana*, the most wonderful aeroplane—the like of which never existed earlier nor would in the future—has often been mentioned in the Hindu scriptural works. And surprisingly the *pushpaka* belonged to Kubera, the god of wealth. Pointing to—in this context, to the Master's classic formula: 'woman and gold'.

It is, surprisingly, a proper symbol for Sri Ramakrishna's function: *kanchana*, gold is one of the aspects he emphasised. Moreover, it is apt because Sri Ramakrishna himself—in an incredible way—flew in his own way to the West. Global figure he is—travelling into the hearts of disciples and admirers. And there is unlimited quantum of absorbing his perennial spirituality. For, a teacher is compared to the philosopher's stone which turns base metal into gold. But the Guru is better than such a process because he transforms the disciple himself. A disciple is turned into a sage.

### Preamble

The following was given by Mrs. Sonavi; the publisher friend of mine added a remarkable inaugural frame to this study of the great Master: Before you start reading this keep in mind that *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* in its own unique way is:

1. The activist stance of karma yoga.
2. The path of love of the Bhagavata.
3. The philosophical ambience of jnana yoga.
4. The narrative dynamics of the Puranas.

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5. The folk elements of the pastoral atmosphere.
6. The wit and humour of the village patois.
7. The traditions of wandering Bauls and their songs.
8. The narrations of psalms and parables.
9. The rapidly changing life styles of a metropolitan city and its *bhadralok*.
10. The vibrant theatre of the day.
11. The divine feminine element as primary.

When I read this, it was overwhelming in its implications. Shall I add one more to make it comprehensive? What about Christ whose vision the Great Master had? Yes, it is there. Getting recognised with joy to the devotees and

### A Global Phenomenon

Sri Ramakrishna is literally a global phenomenon now. The spate of books on religion and spirituality rarely bypasses this remarkable embodiment of the 'universal'. And, these virtues never remain dogmatic. With his incredible experiential spirituality, he singlehandedly carved what now can be seen as a vague, impressive message, confined to Hinduism alone. Indeed, his 'agenda' extended the spiritual as an inclusive experience that never falls into the trap of 'my religion is the only one'. No propaganda, no divisive elements. 'As many faiths, so many paths.'

### A Renaissance: Sacred at the Centre Subsuming the Secular

As timely but timeless, Sri Ramakrishna appears in almost every book on cultural ethos also. Publishing houses now, more or less, without the former 'holier than thou' attitude, go ahead with balanced accounts of this great Master. In short, so far, the phenomenon of Renaissance remained basically European or Western. Now it gets expanded and alert to engage intellectuals of calibre who come up to the task in a reasoned way. In

short, Indian Renaissance is one with the sacred as the centre and the secular as its component.

The new Renaissance phenomenon is not Indian alone. They are 'historical moments as Renaissance'. They are also 'intercultural encounters'. You may add anything you can surely find it in the global phenomenon of not just Sri Ramakrishna but the two integral figures: Sri Sarada Devi and Vivekananda. But, then, they are so integral that what the Master says is seen in the other two, without any dent to their own identity.

### **The Master Reinforces Vedanta**

One, more or less common denominator in the recent studies I came across suggested that there is a shift to Vedanta as central to Sri Ramakrishna. In a very recent study entitled *Minds Without Fear*, we read: "The rhetoric of this revival, in the hands of Ramakrishna (1836–1886) and his followers, as well as those of Aurobindo, all adverted to the restoration of the pure form of this philosophical position, unsullied by centuries of scholastic commentary. Both the Ramakrishna school—represented most prominently by Vivekananda—and Aurobindo present a strikingly modern version of Vedānta."<sup>1</sup> And this meant centrality of the 'idealistic construct of *māya* with that of *līla*, play, or manifestation, developing a more this-worldly form of Vedānta' (ibid.).

### **Representing Global Faith Tradition**

One may regard this as an academic approach. Perhaps, we do require an example, at least one which shows that the great Master is imbued with a mastery which manages to penetrate into areas—far and wide. One let us relish. This is from Reverend James Hughes Reho, an ordained Episcopal priest; the title of his book is cute: *Tantric Jesus: The Erotic Heart of Early Christianity*. Strikingly original, opening a passage through which Sri Ramakrishna's renewing tantra with

freshness and vitality, alongside Christ is natural: Sri Ramakrishna had a vision of Christ. The remarks at three places are exquisitely original. His long and original insights do not permit citation completely for an essay:

The Bengal scint Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) likely one of the greatest human beings of the modern age attained his sense of yogic actualization particularly through devotion to Kali enshrined in the temple at Dakshineshwar where he served as a priest (though a quite unconditional one) Often negligent in the duties of traditional worship, he would spend hours in meditation or singing devotional songs on Kali.

Ramakrishna ... engaged in practices from all the global faith traditions and such intense bhakti (devotion) as Ramakrishna practiced brings about not only a temporary [sic] state of bliss but more importantly feels a process of consciousness transformation that Ramakrishna himself explained as the waking of Shakti and her union with Shiva within him a tantric process.<sup>2</sup>

And the author cites the significance of sadhana in spiritual life of all traditions: For instance: 'Divinization ... is the goal of Christian Tantra. The Prayer of the Heart will be a core part of your practice' (175). And, happily he gives a definition of sadhana, a preamble to the main theme, the path we should traverse carefully yes, but joyously. Sadhana is literally 'a means of accomplishing something' (ibid.).

With this short background, let us explore the dialectic dynamics of sadhana as Sri Ramakrishna practiced it. It is an imperative even for those who have already glimpsed the need we have to recognise that cosmos is the principle of Nature in an interesting study, *cosmic hologram*, Jude Carivan gives us a glimpse of what it would mean or feel that we live in a cosmic hologram: 'God can't be "out there"—a creator of the universe and its creations. Indeed, the greatest breakthrough we may



make as human beings in the twenty-first century is to recognise that we and everything that we call reality in all dimensions and realms of existence are God or whatever we choose for the infinity of cosmic mind, and that we are micro-cosmic, co-cosmic of its ineffable reality.<sup>3</sup> An assertion that comes close to the fact that all religions have their basic gospel.

### ***The Gospel Makers and the Transmission of Power***

We come to the background to all that we have covered above. Before we go to sadhana, we ought to look at the phenomenal emergence of *Kathamrita*. The architect who brought it out or rather already programmed in the Master's divine play had, in store, at that time unforeseen global exposure. When we look at M.'s sadhana we do get another dimension of the Great Master. He chooses with uncanny wisdom, the set of those who made his advent global.

If you don't object, I would like to affirm that we have not given the attention we ought to give to those who figured edition—complete—of the *Gospel*. When Aldous Huxley wrote the Foreword, we rejoice but there are to me more: John Moffit Jr., Mrs. Margaret Woodrow Wilson, Joseph Campbell, and not the least Elizabeth Davidson they all give 'valuable help'. One would like to think they are part of the sadhana, which the Master made it so that it goes into the all-time global scripture of universal relevance.

The 'waxing crescent'<sup>4</sup> Sri Ramakrishna is now full-shedding light all over. The Western admirers now are there for our delight—permanently and profitably. Even when some seem to be incurably prodigal children, a few you can find in our 'great' country itself. In short, we need not confine sadhana only to its spiritual contours. It needs to be given a wider canvas so that all acts, thoughts, and the like, are subject to sadhana introspection.



*Master Mahashay, Sri. 'M.'*

### ***Sadhana Begins: Sahaja, Simple***

It is time now to do sadhana as Sri Ramakrishna lived and taught. But be careful that what elements we see and use are not necessarily uniform.

**H**e who is the Lord of the Universe will teach everyone. He alone teaches us, who has created this universe; who has made the sun and moon, men and beasts, and all other beings; who has provided means for their sustenance; who has given children parents and endowed them with love to bring them up. The Lord has done so many things—will He not show people the way to worship Him? If they need teaching, then He will be the Teacher. He is our Inner Guide.' —*Gospel*, 80.

As far as possible we ought to have a map which is not confined only to Hinduism.

There is a highly pragmatic suggestion that the Master gave us; it uses the word 'simple' to affirm that unless we are 'simple', we have no chance of spiritual progress, let alone have the darshan of God. Thus, sadhana, along with worship are the means: a natural *sahaja* synthesis. 'Sahaja literally means that which is born along with birth. It stands for the original basic nature or quality of a thing at its birth or origination and persists throughout, unchanged. It may be considered an equivalent of Brahman of Advaita Vedānta or Śūnya of Nihilistic Buddhism.'<sup>5</sup>

### **The Child Dabbed with Shiva's Ash, Vibhuti**

One may recall what event forestalled all other events which unrolled later on. Child Gadai was seen lying in 'ash' in a corner of the kitchen! Does it not evoke in us the later event of his dynamic role as Shiva? One should be alert, extremely alert about even a single—apparently trivial—element in the Master's life. In short, it was a symbol which is *sahaja*: the Krishna in his name and Rama, too, need a deep meditative effort to see their significance; in other words, natural, simple events with not so simple a significance for another context or opportunity.

### **Choked with Gurus**

And sadhana ought to get inescapably linked the Master's 'natural congenial and innate' personality. Later events are, more or less the same: natural unfolding of in-folded, incredible potential.

A brief resume of what sadhana, together with *sahaja* constitutes 'a supreme and permanent state of mind' (131). But, then, should he not teach us what it is and make us follow his teachings? No, strictly. Our present spiritual world—if we can venture to say—by and large is choked

with gurus. In this regard, the great Master is a glorious speaker of truth without critics to please or people in power to appease: So that he gives us unblemished real spiritual tradition—see how frank he is: 'The profession of a teacher is like that of a prostitute. It is the selling of oneself for the trifle of money, honour, and creature comfort. For such insignificant things it is not good to prostitute the body, mind and the soul, the means by which one can attain God.'<sup>6</sup> Does it appear harsh? Then we haven't, perhaps, understood his nature. Can we say he has the blessed openness of a rustic?

### **Even Fiction Can be Fact**

It appears that the means by which we can attain God is an all-pervasive phenomenon. There are unmistakable evidences in various forms and various 'outlets'. Even the fictional excellence in the recent Booker Prize winning novel *The Unconsolated* by Kazuo Ishiguro points out at what he names the 'force': 'As soon as the day starts, this other thing, this force, it comes and takes over. And whatever I do, everything between us just goes another way, not the way I want it. I fight against it ... but over the years I've steadily lost ground. It's something that's ... that's happening to me.'<sup>7</sup> Daylight comes, the inevitable happens. Name it 'dream'. Can we perhaps, take 'force' as Shakti? And understand that fiction is fact-based.

### **First Samadhi Experience**

Sri Ramakrishna himself said: 'When I was ten or eleven years old and lived at Kamarpukur, I first experienced Samadhi. As I was passing through a paddy-field, I saw something and was overwhelmed.'<sup>8</sup> Our Master never leaves us in theoretical matter. He concretises: 'There are certain characteristics of God-vision, one feels light, feels joy and experiences the upsurge of a

great current in one's chest, like the bursting of a rocket' (ibid.). The bird in the sky unlocks innate potential—everything is potentially divine. And Sri Ramakrishna's experience is the proof.

### **Sees God So Near and Converses with Him**

The body, mind, and soul are the components of sadhana. And Sri Ramakrishna's sadhana is so penetrating, the awareness of the great Master—hold your breath, as I did mine—'sees God so near him that he always converses with him' (869). Hence, his views are facts which he experienced. Not even visions, one feels. And whatever he sees and says about sadhana is beyond academic descriptions. First, let us look at his position:

I practiced all sorts of sadhana. There are three classes of sadhana: sattvic, rajasic and tamasic. In the sattvic sadhana, the devotee calls on the Lord with great longing or simply repeats His name; He doesn't seek any result in return; the rajasic sadhana prescribes many rituals: purascharana, pilgrimage, panchatapa, worship with sixteen articles and so forth. The tamasic sadhana is worship of God with the help of tamas. The attitude of the tamasic devotee is: "Hail Kali! What? Wilt Thou not reveal thyself to me? If not, I will cut my throat with a knife (744).

The three are not separate or separable. One can dissolve the trinity of sadhanas and make them unified, holistic 'weapon'. In Sri Ramakrishna's worship of Kali, the first two perhaps are acceptable to many. But that would be incomplete. Sri Ramakrishna never left any path from his impeccable ken. Finding Kali was not responding, he took out the knife! One has to, in her or his sadhana, make this the initial step! So that the traditional sattva, rajas, and tamas embody a holistic structure of sadhana.

### **Deep Meditation**

Sri Ramakrishna recommends the other component: 'In deep meditation a man is not at all conscious of the outer world' (ibid.). And, as always happens, the Master makes the abstract sutra concrete: A hunter aiming a bird, his goal, is not at all conscious of the outer world. Similarly, angling in a lake all by himself. No awareness of any disturbance. Appears easy. It is *mahamaya*. We can feel amazed at the incredible art of spirituality as holistic. Everything is Brahman and everyone is entitled to experience it. But, then, our Bankim Chandras are not extinct. But then Vidyasagars are also there alongside, but not comprehensively conforming to the game!

### **Holistic: No Bifurcation**

Sadhana, according to the, even dim, light of this author, came across the fact that the great,

*Gadadhar loses Consciousness watching the cranes in the Sky*





compassionate, Master rarely or never bifurcates anything. And never disappoints us when we begin to think that how can we be free from all faults? Alright. Accepted. Now think of what the Master *did*: 'How many other visions I saw while meditating during my sadhana' (746). He was 'meditating under the Bel-tree when 'Sin' appeared before me and tempted me in various ways. ... He wanted to give me wealth, honour, sex, pleasure, various occult powers' (ibid.). Visions vitiated are also lessons with profound significance. When M., asks Brinde, the maid guarding the Master's room, whether the Master reads books, she is dumbstruck: 'Books! Oh, dear no! They're all on his tongue' (78).

### **Nitya and Lila**

Now sadhana acquires an interrelated structure. What do we do? Can we 'shake-off' all that is needed to even peripheral sadhana? Will the Beloved Master leave us in the lurch? Will he not at least give a technique which we can consider if not completely make it practical? And satisfy ourselves? What! Comparing with the great Master? Answers come pat.

Sadhana balances *nitya* and *lila*. 'But do you know my attitude? I accept both, the Nitya and the Lila. Doesn't God exist if one looks around with eyes open? After realizing Him, one knows that He is both the Absolute and the Universe. It is He who is the Indivisible Satchidananda. Again, it is He who has become the universe and its living beings' (779). Is there some help for both the beginner and the potential adept?

### **Quartet of Sadhana According to the Master**

As we saw earlier, one ought to keep the natural dimension, *sahaja* in mind. Are we getting the illusion that acquaintance with knowledge of sadhana tenets is equivalent to its absorption?

Perhaps, if I don't sound pompous, even at that risk, I thought the following map may help us. It is a quartet of directions to the essentials of sadhana for all those who may or may not have Sri Ramakrishna as their guru. He suggests, the essence:

1. The goal of life is God-realisation.
2. The mind is everything.
3. Action is the means, not the be all and end all.
4. As many faiths, so many paths.

### **Spontaneous Manifestation of Exemplary Shiva**

The goal is clear. How to concretise it? Sadhana, we decided. The strange aspect of Sri Ramakrishna's sadhana is: spontaneous manifestation, early or late, of the highest aspects of holistic spirituality. An event which appears as a natural item has, if we are lucky, unfolds the amazingly deeper aspects: an instance strikes us as simple but it turns out to be a profound dimension if the Master himself blesses us. Of course, 'humankind cannot bear very much reality' they say.

Take the example of the young Gadadhar assuming the role of Shiva in Kamarpukur. In a tantric text we read: Shiva tells the Divine Mother that 'the result of sadhana is, first subtle sound, *avyakta dhvani*, produced in the *brahma-randhra* chakra, where in all the highest energies are deemed to be appeased'. Moreover, there are inner meanings. So far it is a general statement. But Shiva tells the Divine Mother: 'As for the inner meaning, O Great Goddess! it is an experience (or perception) of Śiva, the spiritual master and the self.'<sup>9</sup>

### **Function of the Guru**

Even the guru often uses something without knowing what its function is. The word is derived, I learn, from *Kankala Malini Tantra*. It

means: The sound *gu* denotes darkness; the second *ru* denotes causing the restriction of the darkness. Because such a person removes darkness she or he is called a guru. That is not all. Refer to the *Gospel* and the two contexts explicating the word 'guru' through songs are there for our delight and deliverance from 'ignorance'. Sadhana is unthinkable without guru. Recall that Sri Ramakrishna himself tells: The Shiva emblem is the worship of fatherhood and motherhood.<sup>10</sup> Ardha-narishvara?

### **Living in a Website of Duality**

In his divine play, the Master enacts roles which are likely to ignore the profound significance of his spirituality which is unique and central to sadhana. Not *his* as enacted, but it must be action for us. No enacting. For the *sadhaka*, the Master tells us that we live in a world built and running on the website of duality. The two rails are to be balanced. And quite often, we have to choose what is negative. Even the advent of our Great Master stems from a deeper perspective: balancing of the secular concerns and spiritual longings.

### **Supernatural is Natural**

We need to look at what kind of ethos existed as seen by Western thinkers regarding religion at that time. And it is surprisingly in tune with many eminent thinkers of Renaissance. But, then, let us enjoy looking at a mention of the Master in the sumptuous text entitled *The Oxford Book of the Supernatural*. I was deceived by the title. For, all the stuff of that book has no interest, for us Sri Ramakrishna only. But a random look at the Index gave me an exhilarating 'pull': there is an entry of the Master. It reads: 'The nineteenth century Indian mystic, Ramakrishna, used to tell his disciples of the man who had spent years acquiring the power of walking on the water. Crossing a river on foot, the man

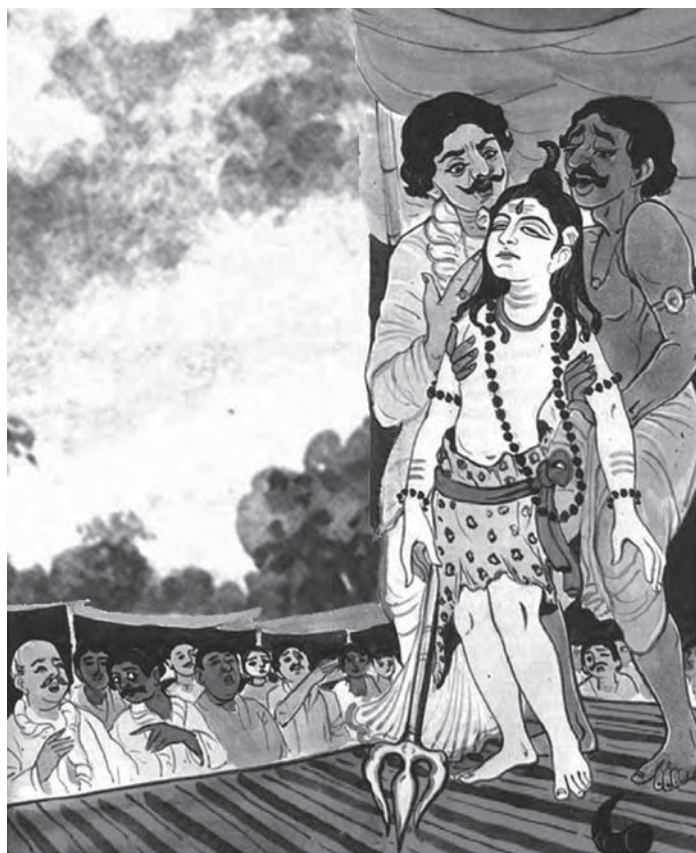
went proudly to his guru, only to be told: "My dear boy, what you have accomplished after fourteen years arduous labour, ordinary men do by paying a penny to the boatman."<sup>11</sup>

I couldn't believe that a book about the supernatural contains a profoundly natural summing up of what is needed in spiritual life of the Guru. And the source? F Max Muller, the scholar who had the nerve to caution Swamiji about the so-called 'supernatural'. Not many know that the 'great' lover of India declared that all his efforts ultimately have the aim for conversion. Don't ask me for a reference, see the book for yourself!

### **Continuing Enlightening Endlessly**

See how the Master's journey into joy through his wisdom envelops the entire-relevant-corpus-when needed? I recall, somewhat vaguely, a painting of the Master on a huge ocean of waves, with joy suffusing his serenity! He thus travelled,

*Young Gadadhar losing Consciousness  
doing Shiva's Role in the Village Drama*



and continues to travel, enlightening numerous seekers, secular or sacred. It doesn't matter. For, many come, few are chosen. Whether they are influenced by the Western—so-called Renaissance and Marxian, Freudian models or above all, some are mired in 'dark' erotic water, it doesn't matter. There are Jacques Lacans who give us relief from the throttling psychosis of, sorry, Freud, as the totally ignorant feel.

### **Immolation: The Final Test**

Let us look at the Master's last step of immolation by a dagger, in spite of tremendous sadhana. This way the very first challenge to Kali—in spite of unparalleled, meticulous worship, no response. Death as a challenge only to the ones the Mother felt. And what do we know from Jacques Lacan? 'The phantasy of one's death, of one's disappearance, is the first object that the subject has to bring into play in this dialectic and he does bring it into play.'<sup>12</sup>

### **Religion Now Enjoys Universal Respect**

The divine play of the Master has as its base, incredible sadhana. Even the six systems of philosophy are futile! And, this is, essentially, a vital restoration of global awareness of religion as an innate spirituality. And Lacan, knowingly or unknowingly, opts for religion: 'Who, nowadays, would dream of reducing the concerns of religion to such simplistic terms? It can be said that, throughout the world, and even where the struggle against it may be at its sharpest, *religion nowadays enjoys universal respect*. ... In every religion that deserves the name, there is in fact an essential dimension reserved for something *operational*' (264–5) [Emphasis added].

### **'Operational': A lila of the Mind**

'Operational' one would like to identify as the practical dimensions. In the context of

immolation, it seems to take the final challenge: accomplishing the goal of exiting from life itself. Perhaps, if *desire* is, central to human consciousness, it requires transformation into adamant will. Achieve or annihilate yourself. In the case of Sri Ramakrishna few can reach its fruition. In one sense—in Sri Ramakrishna's play—the Divine Mother herself kept, so to say, the knife as *her* ornament which has multiple uses. Here it is a crucial, indeed cruel, test. If we extend it, it is a *lila*, play. And he himself told what happened. 'During my sadhana, when I meditated, I would actually see a person sitting near me with a trident in his hand. He would threaten to strike me with the weapon unless I fixed my mind on the Lotus Feet of God, warning me that it would pierce my bones if my mind swayed from God.'<sup>13</sup> Shall we taste a song sung by the Master himself? It was in response to the devotees who gathered there:

O mind, you do not know how to farm!  
Fallow lies the field as your life.  
If you had only worked it well,  
How rich a harvest you might reap!  
Hedge it about with Kali's name  
If you would keep your harvest safe;  
This is the stoutest hedge of all,  
For death himself cannot come near it  
Sooner or later will dawn the day  
When you must forfeit your precious field;  
Gather O mind, what fruit you may,  
Sow for your seed the holy name  
Of God that your Guru has given to you,  
Faithfully watering it with love;  
And if you should find the task too hard,  
Call upon Ramprasad for help (251).

### **Champu Kavya**

*Kathamrita*, the *Gospel*, a *Champu Kavya*, prose-poetry enriching the entire spectrum of passion. And, one more, most significant thing is both the Master and Mother knew how to farm in their respective villages. Linking the most precious components of sadhana through metaphor, all



the elements are interlinked. It receives decoding the imagistic symbolism. And since Sri Ramakrishna himself sang it, we can for our strength getting more strengthened, replace the Master: 'Call upon Ramprasad for help.' Alright. We enjoy and make it more intimate, we will 'call upon Sri Ramakrishna for help'. The *pratiphala* gain, is immense. In another song which follows, Master again reminds us of a crucial element of sadhana. He says and tells us:

As is a man's meditation, so is his feeling of love;  
As is a man's feeling of love so is his gain;  
And faith is the root of all,  
If in the Nectar Lake of Mother  
Kali's feet  
My mind remains immersed,  
Of little use for worship, oblations  
or sacrifice (ibid.).

And, Sri Ramakrishna asks: 'Why should I go to Ganga or Gaya or Kashi, Kanchi or Prabhas!'

No wonder, he reminisced: 'A torrent of spiritual light would come then, deluging my mind and urging me forward. I used to tell the Mother: "Mother, I could never learn from erring men, but I will learn from Thee alone."<sup>14</sup>

### **Gaya Vishnu And His Strides of the Play**

In the light of what has been covered so far, it is obvious that Sri Ramakrishna's advent is unique in the sense that it happened in our times and not in the days of Puranas, in fact, the validity of Puranas. Overall, it covers almost all the traditional forms. But with a difference. A difference which is colossal and all pervading. And it begins with Gaya—a choice which is a kind of

riddle also. It was Master's father's rituals in the family that are concerned with Gaya—eternal phenomenon of death. And the father's dream is revelation so striking that it's actualization results in a worldwide event. Gaya Vishnu's revelation in that place points to the advent of one who is no less than an Incarnation Dissolution on one side, Divine Event of global significance on the other. Eternal cosmic reality of recurrence amidst relapse.

In fact, a volume titled *The Strides of Vishnu* from, somewhat surprisingly, the Oxford



University. It unveils nearly all the aspects of Vishnu. It includes places of pilgrimage, temples, two incarnations, fish, and Shiva, and a host of others. But among all, we are amazed that the preliminary advent of our Master got revealed there! And, if you feel it is a dream, Sri Ramakrishna himself endorsed as authentic source of revelations. That is a different matter. And we have a remarkable, unique response of Sri Ramakrishna to death. Forget not! Bengal is the deeply fish field of tanks!

We may think it is part of the story. Natural and we bypass. But are we interested to know Sri Ramakrishna's response to death of his close family member? Here it is: 'Akshay, died before my very eyes and I felt nothing at that time. I stood there and watched how a man dies. It was as if there were a sword in a sheath, and the sword was suddenly drawn out of the sheath. The sword remained the same as before. Nothing had happened to it. And the sheath lay there, empty. When I saw that, I felt great joy. I laughed and sang and danced' (143). But through one aspect Sri Ramakrishna remained cheerful. But the next day, he felt the impact.

From this phenomenon engineered eternally by Gaya Vishnu, Master absorbed the joy in the beginning and now sorrow. You may feel why expand all the uncontrollable sorrow? For, the simple Master stored all the emotions of a human. Joyful, careful, worried, concerned, in short, all the rasas and their habitation was the reason, I suppose and, one recalls Valmiki's poem on the shot bird, brought into being *shoka*, sorrow as an instant emotion, Rasa texts say, there is rasa in sorrow, like Valmiki's experience of witnessing the shooting of a bird.

### **Sadhana and Songs: Intertexts**

And Sri Ramakrishna is given to the experience of emotions which enrich the humane dimension

of mind. He is a melodious singer, too. Songs he sang quite often evoke sorrow. In a rasa reader, the shooting of the bird is regarded as 'an experience of a transformative moment of *śoka*, grief',<sup>15</sup> resulting in a spontaneous creative occasion. In short, the Master is, obviously, a remarkable connoisseur, so to say, of songs. And the colossal grief of not getting the desired experience in the Kali temple led even to the moment of giving up the body. As Sheldon Pollock puts it in his invaluable study of rasas: 'The specific power of literature lies in the expression of emotion ... but also that the poet's expression of the poet's own emotion constitutes this power' (ibid.).

You may feel that the attempt here is going beyond reasonable space. I agree. But, sadhana in its very nature is not an easy matter. And it has many facets. A modicum of comprehensive attempt is, one feels, needed.


Let us look again at sadhana in the Master's own words, now he cautions, consoles, or offers comfort but what he says, we must meditate upon. And we now can have the Master's own words: 'One must increase one's strength by sadhana: otherwise one cannot preach. As the proverb goes: "You have no room to sleep yourself and you have a friend to sleep with you." There is no place for you to lie down and you say: "Come, friend! Come and lie down with me."' <sup>16</sup>

What we notice about such story is: incredible clarity of thought illustrated with concrete examples which dismantle even a grain of complexity. The normal habit is you should not offend or hurt a friend. But, if you wish to do what is needed, give up what needs to be given up. In short, one can make a distinction between *need* and *desire*. Do we wholeheartedly need sadhana? Or, have initiation from a guru and complacently assure yourself: 'My guru looks after me! No problem!' We do have desires: but we need to strengthen our dispassion with regularity of practice.

## Conclusion

This has already become too long. But, then, sadhana as Sri Ramakrishna showed us and spoke about needs an exposure through the elaboration of what the greatest sadhaka hints at. How much of sadhana? 'A little.' Do we need to say that the Master is compassionate? Following is our job. And where should we do it? 'Go into solitude now and then.' Not lonely! We ought to check the variation.

For this we should be clear about where we stand: among the four classes of human beings: 'The bound, those aspiring after liberation, the liberated and the ever-perfect' (164). This is not a simple job. Introspection is needed, I suppose. And, finally, we consider this: *sattvic*, *rajasic*, and *tamasic*. The most interesting, ironically, seems to be *tamasic*. And the Master says: 'Hail Kali! What? Wilt Thou not reveal Thyself to me? If not, I will cut my throat with a knife!' (774). The final words give us some leeway: 'In this discipline one does not observe conventional purity; it is like the sense of the disciplines prescribed by the Tantra' (ibid.).

The inescapable final word for this context: 'One needs sadhana. Mere study of the scriptures will not do' (779). Obviously the *Gospel* is an exception. 

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Hans Pukur at Dakshineswar Temple Premises





# BALABODHA

*Ancient Wisdom Made Easy*

## Katha


**K**ATHA IS A COMMONLY used Sanskrit word that means a conversation. This is the first word of the two-word combination, *kathamrita*, which is the title of the original Bengali of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Hence, it is important to know the detailed meaning of the word *katha*. This is a Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And in Sanskrit, as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root.

The word *katha* has been derived from the root word *kath*, which means to converse, tell, relate, narrate, report, inform, speak about, declare, explain, describe, show, exhibit, order, command, suppose, state, call, regard as, and pass for. The word *katha* means conversation, speech, talking together, talk, mention, story, tale, and fable. In the context of *kathamrita*, the word would mean conversation.

The word *katha* means a tale and is used in that meaning in the famous work of Somadeva titled *Kathasaritsagara*, the ocean of streams of stories. *Kathasaritsagara* is believed to be a part of the now lost *Brihatkatha* written by Vasavadatta. Sanskrit literature has two forms of *gadya*, prose literature: *akhyayika* and *katha*. However, the difference between these two is quite narrow and often their features overlap. Nonetheless, scholars believe that the great Sanskrit poet and

writer, Banabhatta's *Kadambari* is a *kavya* and his *Harshacharita* is an *akhyayika*. Moral stories are called dharma *katha* and fairy tales are called *pari-katha*. The prose, *katha* is further classified into two: a complete story, *sakala-katha*; and a part or an episode of a story, *ekadesha-varnana* or *khanda-katha*. A narrative poem is called *katha-kavya*, where *kavya* means poetry.

The word *katha* has a different connotation in Nyaya philosophy, where it means a serious conversation or a debate. It is an orchestrated discourse between two people, which is precise, well-articulated, and well-thought out. *Katha* in this sense is a balanced argument to prove one's thesis. It is a well-structured philosophical debate or discussion. Such a debate can be of three kinds: *vada*, discussion; *jalpa*, rejoinder; and *vitanda*, petty objection.

*Vada* can take place between the teacher and the students, where the aim is to arrive at a correct understanding of the truth. *Jalpa* takes place between people of the same status and here the aim is to achieve victory over the other. *Vitanda*, the worse form of discussion is used to simply attack the opponent, not giving any opportunity to the opponent to argue, support one's argument, or to give any other credential in any other form possible. Here the goal is to just bring down the opponent and usually there is no standpoint to be proven or thesis to be established. 

# TRADITIONAL TALES

## *The Sri Rama That Jambavan Saw*

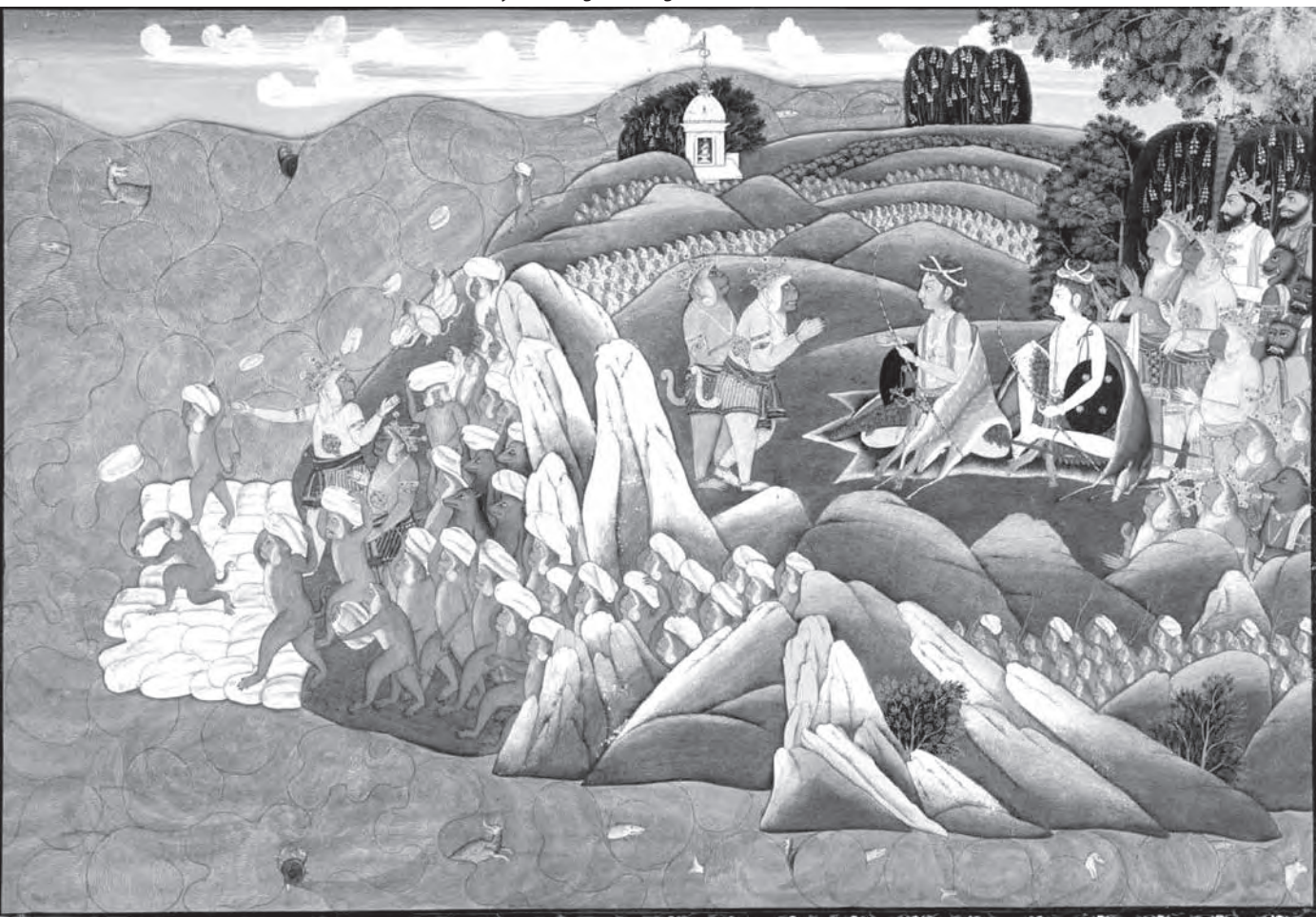
**T**HE LORD OF WORDS, Hanuman made everyone happy while returning after seeing Sita and was very eager to meet Sri Rama and share the news with him. The work of constructing a bridge to Sri Lanka started soon after. After somehow completing the construction of the bridge, Jambavan saluted Sri Rama and said: 'O Lord! I have finished the construction of the bridge with the help of the monkeys. But, the bridge is not wide enough. Therefore, we would have to send our soldiers only in a queue.'

Upon hearing this, Sri Rama said without a

moment's hesitation: 'Come with me, let us inspect the bridge.' Thus, he took Jambavan with him. The innumerable creatures living in the sea started to come to the surface of the sea to have a glimpse of Sri Rama. Of them, some creatures were having huge bodies that were several miles long.

Sri Rama gave a meaningful glance at Jambavan. Unable to understand Sri Rama's glory even then, Jambavan said: 'O Lord! The sea creatures have now come to have your darshan. That is why we are unable to see even the water. But, if

*Monkeys Building the Bridge to Lanka for Rama*






one steps on them, they would all go into the sea. And then, the soldiers would have to drown!’ The sea creatures were watching the form of Sri Rama with bated breath, without blinking an eyelid, without moving their bodies, lest their vision should be disturbed in the least. They were all stationary on the sea surface, enraptured in deep devotion.

Sri Rama said to Jambavan: ‘Throw even a large rock of your choice in the sea and let us see if the creatures go into the water.’ It was then that Jambavan was getting a faint idea of things. Immediately, the soldiers were commanded to cross the sea and move to the other shore. Some

reached the other shore through air. Some others reached the other shore by the bridge that had been constructed. The rest walked on the sea creatures and reached the other shore. Does Sri Rama require the help of someone to build a bridge? Then, Jambavan understood everything.

What do we learn from this story? Those who went by the path of air are the practitioners of jnana yoga, those who went by the bridge are those who follow the path of karma yoga, and those who went by walking on the sea creatures are the practitioners of bhakti yoga. By the grace of God almighty, millions of souls attain to the other shore of moksha by following the path of bhakti. 

*Aerial View of Adam's Bridge (Rama Setu)*





# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



## **Musings On Hinduism**

Nithin Sridhar

Rare Publications, 23 Periyar Road, T Nagar, Chennai 600017. 2016. x + 176 pp. ₹ 200. PB. ISBN 9789383826308.

Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma is, as many believe, a way of life based on the eternal principles. It draws its sustenance from the Vedas and provides a travel map to its followers to journey from 'lesser truth to higher truth' and realise their true Self. A plethora of writings is available and continues to pour about the why and how of this journey. The present book is one such attempt and is a collection of independent articles published in various magazines and blogs between 2007 and 2013.

This book has five sections. The first section 'Hindu Religion and Philosophy' has articles on karma, bhakti, rituals and their relevance, creation, sadhana, tantra, and so on. Sridhar has restrained from musings in this section and has tried to explain lucidly in nutshell the concepts with scriptural support. He writes: 'Tyaga/giving up is not "Inaction". It is performing *Karmas* by giving up the doership of such performance' (2). Any work done with the idea of doership or with the identification will lead to bondage. 'These *Karmas* are also called as "Bandhaka *Karmas*", actions that increases the bondage to the sensory world. If the same *Karmas* that cause Bandhana—Bondage are performed in *Nishkama* way ... such *Karmas* will become "Mochaka"—a way to liberation'. (10).

The ultimate goal of life is to get rid of this karmic bondage and be free. 'And *Bheda* [apara] and *Abheda* [para] *Bhakti* are two stages that ultimately lead a person to *Moksha*' (18). *Apara Bhakti* along with selfless action leads to *Para Bhakti* where a devotee 'has developed an understanding

of *Paramarthika Satya* and sees no difference between his True self and God' (15).

Religion gives purity and the rituals prescribed in the Vedas are the means to this end. Sridhar writes: '*Shastras* clearly speaks of External as well as Internal rituals. Every external activity is deeply connected with internal change and they complement each other' (36). This is due to the fact that these rituals are structures in such a way that if conducted with concentration and devotion the devotee will be able to comprehend their subtle meaning over a period of time. The chapter 'Evolution of Tantras' describes the growth and vastness of the otherwise misconstrued discipline of tantra.

Section two deals with the salient features of Vedanta. As in the first Section, here too Sridhar has allowed his thoughts and expressions to be guided by the scriptures.

In Vedanta the substantial entity is Brahman. Brahman is the all-pervading entity and its realisation is through enquiry. But this realisation is not possible without *chitta shuddhi*—the purification of the mind. Sridhar writes: 'There can be no progress in spiritual path without first purifying the mind. ... The Scriptures declare that the "internal passions" are the real enemies of every person. These internal passions are called as "*Arishadvarga*" and are six in numbers' (67). Through the practice of *viveka*—discrimination, *vairagya*—dispassion, and *shatsampatti*—the six virtues, a seeker can destroy these enemies and attain Self-knowledge. 'These qualities can be achieved through a practice of *Karmas* enjoined in the scriptures with a sense of duty and practice of *Bhakti* by surrendering all one's actions and its fruits to God' (69).

The nature of Brahman is described in the Vedas as '*Satyam, Nityam*' (78), '*Nirakara*/formless', '*ekam*/one', '*Nirguna*', '*Anejat*/unmoving' (83), '*Transcendent and Immanent*' (86), so

on. How an entity can be described with different contradictory names? Sridhar has tried to answer this with clear logical explanations. Brahman manifests the universe of names and forms through Its power of Maya. The universe or *Jagat* has two aspects—the manifested, *Karya* Brahman, having gross and subtle realms and the unmanifested source, also called as *Karana* Brahman. He says that *Nirguna* Brahman does not refer to the *Karana* Brahman or unmanifested Seed. But it refers to Purushottama in its absolute state of Turiya which is beyond all dualities (89–90).

The Scriptures describe Brahman as the material and intelligent cause of this universe. And, to accomplish its desire to manifest, it uses its power, Maya. Sridhar has beautifully explained how Brahman manifests or projects universe through the incident of the disrobing of Draupadi from Mahabharata. He writes: '*Lord Krishna saved her [Draupadi] by covering her body with a cloth of infinite length that he projected using his power. ... Krishna the material and intelligent cause of the cloth ... projected it out as an appearance through his mysterious powers*' (93–4). Therefore, when it is said that the universe of names and forms is the effect of Maya it means that the universe has existence but only apparent and temporary. Consequently, the world of objects is also called *mithya* as it is both existent and non-existent at the same time; it is changing but not everlasting.

Section three 'Hindu Society' has articles on some contemporary issues—'Indians have Forsaken Dharma', 'The Need for Indian Narrative', 'Notes on Hindu Society'. Sridhar has freely relied on his musings in this section and pointed out how the socio-political and economic fabric of the country has been adversely affected by abandoning of dharma. He writes: 'Dharma is defined as "that which upholds"' (112). Section four 'Translation of Sanskrit Hymns' includes the translation of and commentary on few selected hymns. Section five 'Miscellaneous' has the writings on 'The Symbolism of Worship of Shiva Linga' and about a few prominent Hindu deities besides an explanation of the Gayatri mantra.

This book provides thought stimulating reading and enriches the reader with some of the essentials of Vedic religion and philosophy. The Vedas appear to contradict themselves at many places and few of these apparent contradictions are also logically explained in the book.

Saroj R S

Noida, Uttar Pradesh



### Sweet

Nileen Putatunda

Writers Workshop, 162/92 Lake Gardens, Calcutta 700045. 2017. 84 pp. ₹ 150. HB. ISBN 9789350451571.

Nileen Putatunda is a bright young man with a facile pen that betrays his erudition. A humble soul, his writings touch one's mind. This latest addition to his many poetry collections surprises even the reader who follows Putatunda's writings. This volume contains more than ninety poems with the date and place of the creation and occasional credits to someone or some place that inspired the verses.

Putatunda attends a 'Lecture Demonstration', where a boy at 'a roadside tea stall' turns into a 'Harvard professor'. The quirky lines do not fail to evoke empathy: 'With his shirtsleeves rolled up / In a warm, bright auditorium / Who lectured on / A global history of capitalism' (70). When he is grateful to his chosen ideal, Sri Ramakrishna, that he 'swallowed' the 'poison that was meant for me', Putatunda deftly pictures the bond of the devotee and the deity, but repents that it is a 'plague on me / For posing / To be your lover' (43).

The poems are all spiritual and sometimes also, philosophical, and yet bring out the humane in the mundane around us. Putatunda has created all the poetry as a love of labour and donates his earnings to the Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, West Bengal (10). But, he is not doing it all entirely free of cost; he demands 'the highest possible wages / For us all / Self-realization' (58)!

Editor

Prabuddha Bharata

# MANANA

**Exploring thought-currents from around the world.  
Extracts from a thought-provoking book every month.**

## ***Yoga In Practice***

Ed. David Gordon White

Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540. 2012. xii + 397 pp. \$35. PB. ISBN 9780691140865.

## ***Yoga, Brief History of an Idea***

OVER THE PAST DECADES, yoga has become part of the *Zeitgeist* of affluent western societies, drawing housewives and hipsters, New Agers and the old-aged, and body culture and corporate culture into a multi-billion-dollar synergy. Like every Indian cultural artifact that it has embraced, the West views Indian yoga as an ancient, unchanging tradition, based on revelations received by the Vedic sages who, seated in the lotus pose, were the Indian forerunners of the flat-tummied yoga babes who grace the covers of such glossy periodicals as the *Yoga Journal* and *Yoga International*.

In the United States in particular, yoga has become a commodity. Statistics show that about 16 million Americans practice yoga every year. For most people, this means going to a yoga center with yoga mats, yoga clothes, and yoga accessories, and practicing in groups under the guidance of a yoga teacher or trainer. Here, yoga practice comprises a regimen of postures (*āsanas*)—sometimes held for long periods of time, sometimes executed in rapid sequence—often together with techniques of breath control (*prāṇāyāma*). Yoga entrepreneurs have branded their own styles of practice, from Bikram's superheated workout rooms to studios that have begun offering 'doga,' practicing yoga together with one's dog. They have opened franchises, invented logos, packaged

their practice regimens under Sanskrit names, and marketed a lifestyle that fuses yoga with leisure travel, healing spas, and seminars on eastern spirituality. 'Yoga celebrities' have become a part of our vocabulary, and with celebrity has come the usual entourage of publicists, business managers, and lawyers. Yoga is mainstream. Arguably India's greatest cultural export, yoga has morphed into a mass culture phenomenon.

Many yoga celebrities, as well as a strong percentage of less celebrated yoga teachers, combine their training on healing, spirituality, meditation, and India's ancient yoga traditions, the Sanskrit-language *Yoga Sūtra* (YS) in particular. Here, they are following the lead of the earliest yoga entrepreneurs, the Indian gurus who brought the gospel of yoga to the western shores in the wake of Swami Vivekananda's storied success of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

But what were India's ancient yoga traditions, and what relationship do they have to the modern postural yoga that people are practicing across the world today? In fact, the yoga that is taught and practiced today has very little in common with the yoga of the YS and other ancient yoga treatises. Nearly all of our popular assumptions about yoga theory date from the past 150 years, and very few modern-day practices date from before the twelfth century. This is not the first time that people have 'reinvented' yoga in their own

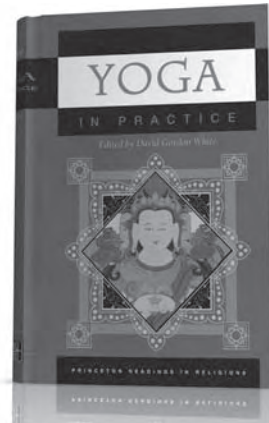




image. As the contributions to this volume demonstrate, this is a process that has been ongoing for at least two thousand years. Every group in every age has created its own version and vision of yoga. One reason this has been possible is that its semantic field—that range of meanings of the term ‘yoga’—is so broad and the concept of yoga so malleable, that it has been possible to morph it into nearly any practice or process one chooses.

When seeking to define a tradition, it is useful to begin by defining one’s terms. It is here that problems arise. ‘Yoga’ has a wider range of meanings that nearly any other word in the entire Sanskrit lexicon. The act of yoking an animal, as well as the yoke itself, is called yoga. In astronomy, a conjunction of planets or stars, as well as a constellation, is called yoga. When one mixes together various substances, that, too, can be called yoga. The yoga has also been employed to denote a device, a recipe, a method, a strategy, a charm, an incantation, fraud, a trick, an endeavor, a combination, union, an arrangement, zeal, care, diligence, industriousness, discipline, use, application, contact, a sum total, and the Work of alchemists. But this is by no means an exhaustive list.

So, for example, the ninth-century *Netra Tantra*, a Hindu scripture from Kashmir, describes what it calls subtle yoga and transcendent yoga. Subtle yoga is nothing more or less than a body of techniques for entering into and taking over other people’s bodies. As for transcendental yoga, this is a process that involves superhuman female predators, called *yoginīs*, who eat people! By eating people, this text says, the *yoginīs* consume the sins of the body that would otherwise bind them to suffering rebirth, and so allow for the ‘union’ (*yoga*) of their purified souls with the supreme god Śiva, a union that is tantamount to salvation. In this ninth-century source, there is no discussion whatsoever of postures or

breath control, the prime markers of yoga as we know it today. More troubling still, the thrid- to fourth-century CE YS and *Bhagavad Gītā* (BhG), the two most widely cited textual sources for ‘classical yoga,’ virtually ignore postures and breath control, each devoting a total of fewer than ten verses to these practices. They are far more concerned with the issue of human salvation, realized through the theory and practice of meditation (*dhyāna*) in the YS and through concentration on the god Kṛṣṇa in the BhG.

### **Indian Foundations of Yoga Theory and Practice**

Clearly something is missing here. There is a gap between the ancient, ‘classical’ yoga tradition and yoga as we know it. In order to understand the disconnect between then and now, we would do well to go back to the earliest uses of the term yoga, which are found in texts far more ancient than the YS or BhG. Here I am referring to India’s earliest scriptures, the Vedas. In the circa fifteenth-century BCE *Ṛg Veda*, yoga meant, before all else, the yoke one placed on a draft animal—a bullock or warhorse—to yoke it to a plow or chariot. The resemblance of these terms is not fortuitous: the Sanskrit ‘yoga’ is a cognate of the English ‘yoke,’ because Sanskrit and English both belong to the Indo-European language family (which is why Sanskrit *mātr* resembles the English ‘mother,’ *sveda* looks like ‘sweat,’ *udara*—‘belly’ in Sanskrit—looks like ‘udder,’ and so forth). In the same scripture, we see the term’s meaning expanded through metonymy, with ‘yoga’ being applied to the entire conveyance or ‘rig’ of a war chariot: to the yoke itself, the team of horses or bullocks, and the chariot itself with its many straps and harnesses. And, because such chariots were only hitched up (*yukta*) in times of war, an important Vedic usage of the term yoga was ‘wartime,’ in contrast to *kṣema*, ‘peacetime.’



# REPORTS



Prabuddha Bharata Editorial Office and Library Building—Old and New

## **Inauguration of the New Prabuddha Bharata Building**

Swami Vivekananda fell on the world like a sword blade after his success in the Parliament of Religion in 1893. He naturally wanted an organisation whose work would be at the vanguard of the spiritual wave he had raised. Thus came into being the Ramakrishna Movement. His fiery lectures abroad and his epistles to his acquaintances, inspired people everywhere. On his advice, his admirers in Chennai started a journal, *Prabuddha Bharata or Awakened India*. This in a short time would become the voice of this new organisation, ‘to bring millions sunk in darkness, to the light of the Lord’. In July 1896 the first issue of the journal rolled off the press. It is since being published uninterruptedly every month for the last 123 years.

Throughout *Prabuddha Bharata*’s journey, the lack of funds was compensated by an abundance of noble motivation and love for Swamiji. After two years, its editor Rajam Iyer passed away suddenly. Swamiji, then resting in Almora

after his nation-awakening tour from Colombo, asked his English disciples, Captain Sevier and his wife to revive the journal. The Captain had a press, type, and ink transported from Kolkata. The journal, which had missed a number, was now brought out from Thompson House in Almora town, with Swamiji’s disciple, Swami Swarupananda, as editor.

Captain Sevier was in the meanwhile, at the behest of Swamiji, looking for an ideal place, deep in the Himalayas, for the Advaita Ashrama. He finally found one in Mayavati, now in the district of Champawat, 6,400 feet above sea level. The journal with the press followed quickly. This was March 1899. *Prabuddha Bharata* continued to be regularly published, thanks to the monks and a few local people. It is staggering to imagine them faithfully working in stringent financial conditions, cold, rain, compounded with shortage of paper, ink, and so on, and carrying materials on horseback from a long distance and then despatching the journal at the equally distant post office.





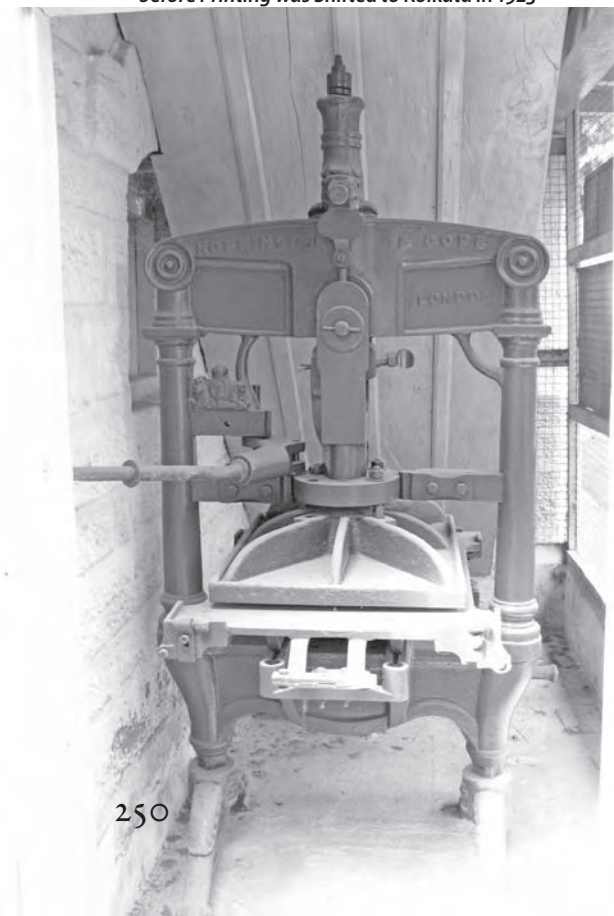
*The Prabuddha Bharata Old Building*



*Inside View of the Old Building*

In 1914 a separate building was erected nearby exclusively for the journal and the press. As printing technology was improving, it was felt wise to shift the printing to a modern city, which would also help in timely despatch. Thus from 1923 the printing was done in Kolkata, while the editorial section stayed back. Manuscripts were unfailingly sent, despite wars, natural calamities, strikes, and so on. Thanks to fast communication technology today, the entire journal is produced

*The Original Press Machine Used for Printing the Prabuddha Bharata before Printing was Shifted to Kolkata in 1923*



at Mayavati and sent for printing to the Kolkata office from Mayavati itself through email.

Responding to the rapid improvement in the technology and infrastructure, the *Prabuddha Bharata* team had started relying more and more on computers and Internet for all its purposes. The building that had housed *Prabuddha Bharata* since 1914, for over hundred years, was now showing the signs of dilapidation and needed repair. Alongside that, the *Prabuddha Bharata* office needed better computer networking and spacious interior setup to serve the changing needs of time and persons involved. Moreover, a vast number of books—over 14000—were arranged in six different places in the Ashrama premises which caused inconvenience in fetching and managing the books. In the sometimes extreme climatic conditions of Mayavati, it was desirable to have a single library hall to keep all the books needed for the journal.

With this end in view, the plan for the new PB building was made in 2013. With some initial hesitation, the proposal for the new building was sanctioned by the headquarters at Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, West Bengal. The architectural plan was made and the new building was to have a library at the ground floor and the journal's office and the residential quarters of the Editor and the Associate Editor on the first floor. The construction started in June 2014 and gradually overcoming various stumbling blocks, it got completed in October 2017.

The building was inaugurated by Swami





*Inside and Outside View of the Old Building*

Bodhasarananda, Assistant General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, on 22 October 2017, in the presence of about forty monks and two hundred invited guests. After the new building was declared open, all those present maintained silence and prayed for a couple of minutes in the Library Hall after which tea was distributed to all.

A public meeting was conducted at the Vivekananda Hall near the guest house, immediately after the opening of the new building. Swamis Bodhasarananda; Muktidananda, the present Adhyaksha of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati; Satyamayananda, a former editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* and the present Secretary of

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Kanpur; Atmashraddhananda, a former editor of *The Vedanta Kesari* and presently an Acharya at the Probationers' Training Centre, Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math; and Narasimhananda, the present editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*; spoke to an audience of about two hundred including monks and invited guests. Bodhasarananda narrated the recent developments of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, and other swamis also enlightened the audience by their insightful talks about Advaita Ashrama, in general, and *Prabuddha Bharata*, in particular.

The inauguration program was accompanied with three-day spiritual retreat only for monks wherein around thirty monks from across the

*Rear View of the New Building*





**Inauguration of the New Prabuddha Bharata Editorial Office and Library Building**



**The New Library Hall**

country and a visiting monk from the US, participated. Various topics such as Advaita Vedanta, scriptures, monastic life, and so on, were discussed amongst the monks in a very positive

environment among the green meadows of Mayavati. Overall the entire four-day function for the opening of the new building of the *Prabuddha Bharata* was exceedingly successful.

**Inaugural Program at  
Vivekananda Hall, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati**





### **New Math and Mission Centre**

A new branch centre of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission has been started at Chandpur in Bangladesh. Its address is 'Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama and Ramakrishna Mission, 652, Mission Road, Chandpur-3600, Bangladesh', phone: (880) 0841-65797, and email: <chandpur@rkmm.org>.

### **New Math Sub-Centre**

A sub-centre of Ramakrishna Math, directly under the supervision of the Headquarters, has been started at the house of Sri Mahendranath Gupta, also known as 'M', the chronicler of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The address of the sub-centre is 'Ramakrishna Math (Kathamrita Bhavan), 13/2 Guruprasad Chowdhury Lane, Kolkata 700006'. Swami Suhitananda, the then General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the sub-centre on 4 January 2017, the sacred birthday of Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj.

### **New Mission Centres**

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Burdwan, which was a sub-centre directly under the supervision of the Headquarters, has been made a full-fledged branch centre of Ramakrishna Mission. Its address is 'Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Bajepuratappur, Katwa Road, Burdwan, West Bengal 713101', and email: <burdwan@rkmm.org>.

A new branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission has been started in the state of Goa. The address of the centre is 'Ramakrishna Mission, PO Khandepar, Parsol (Usgao), Inside from Khursakade Bus Stop, After Choughule Maruti Service Center, Ponda, Goa 403406', phone: 94140 42638, email: <goa@rkmm.org>, and website: <www.rkmmgoa.org>. The centre was formally inaugurated on 28 May 2017 in a



*Inauguration of Ramakrishna Math (Kathamrita Bhavan)*

programme which was attended by Swami Gautamanandaji, Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; Swami Suhitananda, the then General Secretary; Sri Shripad Yesso Naik, Union Minister of State, Ministry of AYUSH; other dignitaries, about 25 monks, and 200 devotees.

A new branch centre of Ramakrishna Mission has been started on the premises of Ekalavya Model Residential School (EMRS) and an adjacent plot of land at Jhargram in West Bengal leased out by the Government of West Bengal. The government had been running this school before handing over its management to Ramakrishna Mission. The school has been renamed 'Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira (EMRS)'. The address of the centre is 'Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Satyaban Pally, Jhargram, West Bengal 721507', phone: 94325 61721, and email: <jhargram@rkmm.org>.





Opening of Coaching-cum-vocational Training Centre at Bagda

Another branch centre of Ramakrishna Mission has been started on the thirty-six acres of land at Lumdung village in East Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh received as a gift from Nanghee Natung Moya Tacha Welfare Society and the people of Lumdung. The address of the centre is 'Ramakrishna Mission, Lumdung, PO Seppa, Dt. East Kameng, Arunachal Pradesh 790102', phone: 94368 87828, and email: <lumdung@rkmm.org>. Construction of the buildings of the centre will start shortly.

One more branch centre of Ramakrishna Mission has been started on the five acres of land at New Town in Kolkata leased out by the Government of West Bengal on a perpetual basis. The address of the centre is 'Ramakrishna Mission Centre for Human Excellence and Social Sciences, Near Eco Park car-parking area, New Town, Kolkata 700156', phone: 94333 10079, and email: <kolkata.newtown@rkmm.org>. Construction of buildings of the centre is in progress.

### New Math Centres

The *Kutirs* in Rishikesh and Uttarkashi, which were maintained by the Headquarters, have been upgraded to the status of full-fledged centres of

Ramakrishna Math. The addresses of the centres are as follows:

'Ramakrishna Math, Mayakund, Rishikesh, Dt. Dehra Dun, Uttarakhand 249201', phone: 94470 51231, and email: <rishikesh@rkmm.org>.

'Ramakrishna Math, Ganganagar, PO and Dt. Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand 249193', phone: 94470 51231, and email: <uttarkashi@rkmm.org>.

### News of Branch Centres

On the occasion of the golden jubilee of **Ramakrishna Mission, Aalo**, a fibreglass statue of Swamiji has been installed on the centre's campus. The statue was unveiled on 17 February 2017.

A student of the Ashrama school was awarded bronze medal in the International Taekwondo Championship held by Bhutan Taekwondo Federation from 26 to 28 May at Thimphu, Bhutan.

**Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Agartala** organised a blood donation camp on 26 June which was inaugurated by Sri Manik Sarkar, Chief Minister of Tripura. A total of 32 persons donated blood in the camp.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Asansol** built a temporary shed to give shelter to pilgrims during Jayadev Mela at Kenduli in Birbhum district. About 2,000 pilgrims stayed in the shed from 13 to 15 January.

The building for the coaching-cum-vocational training centre at **Ramakrishna Math, Bagda** was declared open on 13 April.

On 8 March, Swami Suhitananda, then the General Secretary, inaugurated 'Maa Sarada Abasan', the living quarters at Jai Narayan Banerjee Lane, Kolkata, built by **Ramakrishna Math, Baranagar** for rehabilitation of families who had been living in a slum adjacent to the centre.

The new building to house office and book-stall at **Ramakrishna Math, Barasat** was inaugurated by Swami Suhitananda, then the General Secretary, on 2 April.



*Inauguration of the Faculty and Scholars' House at Vivekananda University, Belur, and a Meditation Gallery at the School of Indian Heritage*

On 29 January, the sacred birthday of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, Srimat Swami Vagishanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the Faculty and Scholars' House at **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur**, and a meditation gallery at the School of Indian Heritage on the same campus. Two students of the Sanskrit Department of the University won silver medals, and another of its students a bronze medal, at the national level cultural competitions conducted by Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi, on its **Agartala** campus from 28 to 31 December 2016. All the three winners received certificates and cash prizes totalling ₹ 19,000 in addition to the medals.

An assistant professor at **Narendrapur** faculty centre of the University received the Young Scientist Award from the Society of Extension Education, Agra, for his contribution to the field of extension education. The award was handed over on 29 January in the Eighth National Extension Education Congress held at National Academy of Agricultural Research Management, Hyderabad.

Seven students of the Sanskrit Department of the University won 2 gold medals, 1 silver medal, 3 bronze medals, and 3 consolation prizes at the Eleventh All India Sanskrit Students' Talent

Festival conducted by Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidyaapeetha, Tirupati, from 30 January to 2 February. All the winners received certificates and cash prizes in addition to the medals.

The University in association with Central Council for Research in Yoga and Naturopathy (CCRYN), Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India, held a Yoga Festival on its main campus in Belur from 17 to 19 March. The three-day programme was inaugurated by Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, and consisted of a variety of events such as seminars, interactive sessions, yoga workshops, and demonstrations. About 1,000 people took part in the programme on all the days.

UGC has included the University under section 12B of UGC Act, 1956. This confers eligibility to the University to receive grants from UGC.

The 12th foundation day celebration and the annual convocation of the University were held at **Narendrapur** on 4 July. In all, 101 students received their degrees.

Sri Dharmendra Pradhan, Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India, inaugurated the first floor of the hostel building at **Ramakrishna Math and**



*Special Leprosy Awareness Programme at Chennai*

**Ramakrishna Mission, Bhubaneswar** on 11 April.

In the final phase of its yearlong centenary celebration, **Ramakrishna Math, Chandipur** conducted a devotees' convention on 25 December and an interfaith meet on 20 January. Besides, the centre held a few public meetings and cultural competitions for students and brought out a commemorative volume. A good number of people attended the programmes.

NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) awarded A+ grade to Vivekananda College of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Chennai** for five years in the third cycle, and A++ grade to the College of Education of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalyaya, Coimbatore** for five years in the second cycle.

A team of four students of **Vivekananda College, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Chennai**, won the national level music competition, Bhajan Samrat, conducted by the channel Sri Sankara TV. The final competition was held in Chennai on 24 December. The team received a trophy and a cash prize of three lakh rupees. Individual medals and certificates were given to all the four students.

International Foundation for Environment and Ecology, Kolkata, and Confederation of Indian Universities, New Delhi, have jointly

conferred 'Young Scientist of the Year 2016' award on a professor of Botany at the Chennai Vidyapith. The award carrying a shield and a certificate was handed over at a programme held in Ranchi on 27 March.

Two students of Vivekananda College of the Vidyapith won second and third positions in the state-level boxing championship held by Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu in March. Silver and bronze medals, as well as cash prizes of 75,000 and 50,000 rupees, were awarded to them on 15 September.

**Ramakrishna Math, Chennai** distributed buttermilk and sharbat to about 22,000 people on 8 and 9 April on the occasion of the annual Ratha Yatra and other celebrations of Sri Kapaleeshwarar Temple, Chennai. The centre also conducted a cleaning programme around the temple on 9 April.

Students of **Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Chennai**, polytechnic participated in the State Polytechnic College Games and Sports (SPCGS) Divisional Tournament 2016-7 organised by Directorate of Technical Education, Government of Tamil Nadu, and secured 1st place in Athletics, Handball and Kho-Kho, and 2nd place in Ball Badminton. The Kho-Kho team secured 1st place in the SPCGS State level tournament also.



The Headmistress of Model Higher Secondary School of **Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Vidyalaya, Chennai** received first prize, under Environmental Protection and Management category, from the Department of Environment, Government of Tamil Nadu. The award comprising a citation and 15,000 rupees was handed over to her on 5 June.

A student of the College of Arts and Science of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore** who participated in the Advanced Leadership Camp conducted by NCC Group Headquarters, Coimbatore, from 3 to 14 December 2016 received a medal and a certificate for his outstanding performance.

A facility for Siddha Vaidya treatment was inaugurated at **Ramakrishna Mission, Delhi** on 24 April.

Sushri Uma Bharti, Union Minister for Water Resources and River Development, visited the Delhi ashrama on 30 July.

On 29 October, Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, inaugurated the new building of the Delhi ashrama constructed on an adjacent plot for conducting educational activities.

**Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar**

*Sapling Plantation 'Hariyali Mahotsav' at Gwalior*



served lemonade to about 5,000 pilgrims during the Shravani Mela from 9 July to 7 August.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Guwahati** conducted a free medical camp during Ambubachi Mela near Kamakhya Temple from 22 to 25 June in which 4,355 patients were treated.

Prof. Kaptan Singh Solanki, Governor of Haryana, visited **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Gwalior** on 2 August and took part in the sapling plantation programme conducted there.

The newly developed playgrounds at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Hatamuniguda** were declared open on 3 February.

The renovated primary school building on Uripok campus of **Ramakrishna Mission, Imphal** was inaugurated on 19 April.

Sri N N Vohra, Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, declared open the building for the Educational and Cultural Centre at **Ramakrishna Mission, Jammu** on 5 April in the presence of Swami Suhitananda, then the General Secretary, and a number of monks and devotees.

On 11 October, Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal, laid the foundation stone for the developmental activities of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Jhargram** on the

*Opening of Educational and Cultural Centre at Jammu*





Release of the Book *Letters of Sister Nivedita* (in two volumes)



Free Meals Distribution at Gangasagar Mela at Manasadwip

land recently allotted by the Government of West Bengal. The land is situated adjacent to our school there. She also inaugurated on the same day a permanent exhibition titled 'Ekatai Sampriti' — 'unity leads to harmony' — at the school.

Swami Suhitananda inaugurated the first floor on the Chandramani Smriti Sadan, dining-hall, at **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Kamarpukur** on 15 February.

The Multipurpose School of Kamarpukur ashrama and the Vidyalaya of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur** have bagged the Best School Award from the School Education Department, Government of West Bengal. The award consisting of a memento, a certificate, and a sum of 25,000 rupees was given to each school in a function held at Kolkata on 5 September. Narendrapur Vidyalaya also received 'Excellent Missionary School in India' award from CMAI (Communication Multimedia And Infrastructure) Association of India at a function held at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi, on 5 September.

Sri Sarbananda Sonowal, Chief Minister of Assam, visited **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Seva Samiti, Karimganj** on 3

May. The year-long centenary celebration of Karimganj centre was inaugurated on 10 May, the sacred Buddha Purnima day, by Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj. A number of monks and about 500 devotees attended the programme.

The following centres conducted summer camps for students. The programme included chanting, bhajans, yogasanas, values education classes, and so on. 1) **Ramakrishna Math, Kayamkulam**: From 3 to 8 April in which 16 students participated and from 17 to 22 April in which 14 students participated; 2) **Ramakrishna Math, Kochi**: From 8 to 12 April in which 30 students participated.

On 15 September, Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, released, at Belur Math, the new edition of *Letters of Sister Nivedita* (in two volumes) published by **Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata**.

Dr Tathagata Roy, Governor of Tripura, visited **Ramakrishna Math, Lucknow** on 28 February and took part in Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebration.

On 4 March, the first floor of the guesthouse

of the Lucknow ashrama was inaugurated and the newly set-up seven modular operation theatres at the hospital were declared open.

**Ramakrishna Math, Madurai** distributed buttermilk to about 2,000 people from 9 to 13 May on the occasion of Chaitra Purnima festival.

On the occasion of Gangasagar Mela, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Manasadwip** held a camp at the Mela area from 11 to 16 January. In all, 1,438 pilgrims were provided with free board and lodging at the camp and the Ashrama. Besides, free meals were served to about 400 non-resident pilgrims daily. Discourses and devotional singing were also arranged in the camp.

The new building at **Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati** which will house the *Prabuddha Bharata* editorial office and a library, was inaugurated on 22 October. Following the inauguration, a three-day spiritual retreat for monks was held, in which 31 monks from our different centres took part.

The new building for diagnostic unit and the ground floor of the patients' recovery building at **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Muzaffarpur** were inaugurated on 9 and 12 June respectively.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur** held a *kisan mela*, farmers' fair, on 21 January which was visited by about 7,000 farmers.

The ashrama held a five-day sports meet from

5 to 9 April in which 1,500 students from 30 schools of 3 districts in Chhattisgarh participated.

The football team of the school of the Ashrama won the football championship conducted by Central Reserve Police Force. Dr Raman Singh, Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, handed over a cup and a sum of 50,000 rupees to the team on 21 May.

A girl student of the school of Narainpur ashrama who stood first in the Class 12 examinations - 2017 among students of Narainpur district was selected for Swarna Sharada Scholarship instituted by IBC 24 news channel. Dr Raman Singh, Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh, presented her with 50,000 rupees and a citation at a function held in Raipur on 22 June.

The football team, under-17 group, of the school of the Ashrama won the state-level Subroto Cup Football Championship in the final match held at Dongargarh, Chhattisgarh, on 17 July.

Blind Boys' Academy of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur** celebrated its diamond jubilee from 20 to 22 January. Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the event which included a colourful exhibition put up by the Academy's students, a seminar on 'Emergence of library services for the visually impaired', cultural shows,

Opening of the Prabuddha Bharata Editorial Office and a Library







*Divyayan Krishi Vigyan Kendra of Ranchi Morabadi was awarded Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Rashtriya Krishi Vigyan Protsahan Puraskar 2016; and the Kendra Conducting Camp on Rashtriya Mahila Kisan Diwas in Ranchi on 11 October 2017*

and competitions. A large number of dignitaries, former students, guardians of the students, and others attended the three-day celebration.

Sri P B Acharya, Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, visited **Ramakrishna Mission, Narotam Nagar** on 30 August.

The annexe to the school building at **Ramakrishna Math, Nattarampalli** was declared open on 2 April.

Sri Ram Nath Kovind, then the Governor of Bihar, visited **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Patna** on 24 January.

Sri Nitish Kumar, Chief Minister of Bihar, attended Durga Puja at the Ashrama on 28 September, the Mahashtami day.

Lieutenant Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Prof Jagdish Mukhi, attended Durga Puja celebration at **Ramakrishna Mission, Port Blair** on 28 October, Mahashtami day.

Srimat Swami Shivamayanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the dining-hall at **Ramakrishna Math, Puri** on 21 April and the extension to the monks' quarters at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Puri** on 24 April.

On the sacred occasion of Ratha Yatra, **Ramakrishna Math, Puri** conducted a medical

camp from 25 June to 3 July in which 607 patients were treated. The Ashrama also served sharbat, refreshing drink, to 12,000 pilgrims.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Puri** served lemonade to about 20,000 pilgrims and distributed 18,000 pouches of drinking water among them during the Ratha Yatra festival. In the medical camp organised on this occasion 165 patients were treated.

Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, inaugurated the new monks' quarters at **Ramakrishna Math, Puri** on 11 September.

**Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Purulia** held the inaugural function of its yearlong diamond jubilee celebration on 12 April, with a public meeting and a cultural programme.

A student of the Purulia Vidyapith has been awarded a scholarship of 37,000 euros—about 26 lakh rupees—by Education, Audiovisual, and Culture Executive Agency, a unit of European Union, for pursuing his master's degree in Nuclear Physics in Europe.

Vivekananda Centenary College of **Ramakrishna Mission Boys' Home, Rahara** has been conferred autonomous status by the University Grants Commission (UGC) for six years—from 2017–8 to 2022–3.

In association with the Government of Jharkhand, **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi Morabadi** conducted Yuva Jagaran Vivek Rath Parikrama from 21 December 2016 to 12 January 2017. The Rath visited all the 24 districts of Jharkhand.

**The Ashrama** held a central kisan mela on 23 and 24 January. Smt Draupadi Murmu, Governor of Jharkhand, and Sri Sudarshan Bhagat, Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Family Welfare, among others, attended the concluding session of the event. The fair was visited by about 12,000 farmers.

On 17 February, Sri Ram Kripal Yadav, Minister of State for Rural Development, Government of India, visited Tirlakocha village in Ranchi district to see the rural development works being carried out by the Ranchi Morabadi ashrama which have earned a good name.

The Ranchi Morabadi ashrama conducted an eye care programme from 22 February to 21 March in which eye check-up of 1,137 persons was done and 4 patients were operated upon for cataract.

Divyayan Krishi Vigyan Kendra of the ashrama has been awarded Pandit Deendayal

Upadhyay Rashtriya Krishi Vigyan Protsahan Puraskar 2016 by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research. The award comprising a certificate and 2.25 lakh rupees was handed over by Sri Radha Mohan Singh, Union Minister of Agriculture, at a function held in Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi, on 15 March.

Divyayan Krishi Vigyan Kendra of the Ashrama has been awarded Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Rashtriya Krishi Vigyan Protsahan Puraskar 2016–17 at the national level by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research. The award comprising a certificate, a citation and 25 lakh rupees was handed over by Sri Radha Mohan Singh, Union Minister of Agriculture, at a function held in Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi, on 16 July. Earlier in March 2017 the institution had bagged the same award at the zonal level.

Bommidala Srikrishna Murthy Foundation, Guntur, selected **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Rajamahendravaram** for Spoorthi Award in recognition of its service to society. The award carrying a memento, a citation, and three lakh rupees was handed over at a function held in Guntur on 26 March.

*Eye Camp at Madurai Math on 16 April 2017*



*Nattarampalli Math Celebrated Pongal*







Opening of Cardiac Catheterization Laboratory at the Vrindaban Sevashrama Hospital

**Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha** held conventions for devotees, teachers, and drivers of public transport vehicles on 1 and 2 July to mark the conclusion of its platinum jubilee celebration.

The concluding programme of the year-long platinum jubilee celebration of Vidyamandira, Arts and Science college under **Saradapitha**, comprising a special lecture and release of a commemorative volume, was held on 4 July.

Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal, visited **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi** on 12 April.

Swami Suvirananda released the first volume of the complete works of Swami Akhandananda in Bengali, titled *Swami Akhandananda Rachana Sankalan*, at the Institute of Culture, Kolkata, on 5 September. The book is published by the Sargachhi Ashrama.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji, then Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the renovated monks' quarters, now renamed Brahmananda Bhavan, at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sarisha** on 17 April.

**Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata** conducted a round-the-clock medical camp during Makar Sankranti Mela at Sagar Island in South 24-Parganas district from 10 to 16

January 2017. In all, 7,389 patients were treated, out of which 8 received indoor medical care. Besides, 150 blankets and about 5,000 copies of religious books were distributed among the pilgrims. The centre also held a similar camp during Jayadev Mela at Kenduli in Birbhum district from 13 to 15 January in which 619 patients were treated.

Sri Banwarilal Purohit, Governor of Meghalaya, visited Vivekananda Cultural Centre of **Ramakrishna Mission, Shillong** on 3 June.

Sri Banwarilal Purohit, Governor of Meghalaya, and some cabinet ministers of Meghalaya Government visited the ashrama during Durga Puja days.

Srimat Swami Vagishanandaji Maharaj, inaugurated the extended and renovated 'Sri Ramakrishna Smriti Bhavan' at **Ramakrishna math (Beni Pal Udyan), Sinthi** on 20 August, the sacred birthday of Swami Advaitanandaji Maharaj.

Justice (Retd) Sri P Sathasivam, Governor of Kerala, inaugurated the operation theatre block at **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Thiruvananthapuram** on 30 March in the presence of several dignitaries and a number of devotees, well-wishers, and staff.

Vivekananda Sabhangana, a multipurpose hall, at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Tirupati** was inaugurated on 2 April.



**Ramakrishna Ashrama, Tiruvalla** held Sri Ramakrishna Vachanamrita Sathram, a week-long festival centred on *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, from 21 to 27 February. Sri Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, inaugurated the festival through videoconferencing. A large number of people participated in the programme.

On 18 October, Sri Pinarayi Vijayan, Chief Minister of Kerala, presented an award, on behalf of Tiruvalla chapter of Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), to Tiruvalla Ashrama recognizing the centre as a symbol of universal humanism and religious harmony.

Sri Ram Nath Kovind, then the Governor of Bihar, inaugurated the cardiac catheterization laboratory at the hospital of **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban** on 8 April.

Swami Suvirananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the building comprising cabins for patients and an ICU at the Vrindaban Sevashrama on 7 June.

The students' team of the Swami Vivekananda College of **Ramakrishna Mission, Fiji** won the National Championship in the National Swimming Competitions 2017 held by Fiji National Swimming Association on 26 and

27 May. The students secured the following medals: Gold: 49, Silver: 26, Bronze: 19.

The following centres conducted summer camps for students. The programme included chanting, bhajans, yogasanas, values education classes, and so on. **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Aurangabad**: From 1 to 10 May, 119 students participated; **Ramakrishna Math, Bengaluru**: 16 to 30 April, 100 students participated; **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**: From 2 to 31 May, 250 students, and from 15 to 23 May, 54 students participated; **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chennai**: 7 to 28 May, 40 students participated; **Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad**: From 10 to 22 April, 410 students, and from 24 April to 23 May, 1,868 students participated; **Ramakrishna Math, Kadapa**: 3 to 9 June, 250 students participated; **Ramakrishna Mission, Indore**: 8 to 10 May, 40 students participated; **Ramakrishna Math, Madurai**: 24 April to 12 May, 150 students participated; **Ramakrishna Saradashrama, Ponnampet**: 23 to 30 April, 110 students participated; **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Porbandar**: 8 to 28 May, 85 students participated; **Ramakrishna Math, Pune**: 23 to 28 May, 120 students participated; **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna**

Inauguration of the extended and renovated 'Sri Ramakrishna Smriti Bhavan' at Sinthi





*Summer Cultural Classes at Rajamahendravaram (Rajahmundry)*

**Mission, Rajamahendravaram:** 1 to 28 May, 287 students participated; **Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot:** 1 to 28 May, 506 students participated; **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Salem:** 17 to 26 May, 35 students participated; **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Tirupati:** 1 to 14 May, 61 students participated; **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Memorial, Vadodara:** 30 April to 7 May, 122 students participated.

Durga Puja, in image, was celebrated at the following 26 centres: **Antpur, Asansol, Barasat, Contai, Cooch Behar, Dhaleswar** (under Agartala), **Ghatshila, Guwahati, Gwalior, Jalpaiguri, Jamshedpur, Jayrambati, Kailashahar, Kamarpukur, Karimganj, Lucknow, Malda, Medinipur, Mumbai, Patna, Port Blair, Rahara, Shella** (under Cherrapunjee), **Shillong, Silchar, and Varanasi Advaita Ashrama.** Also

at **Durban (South Africa)** and its sub-centres at **Chatsworth and Pietermaritzburg, Lusaka (Zambia), Mauritius,** and 14 centres in Bangladesh, namely **Baliati, Barisal, Chandpur, Chittagong, Comilla, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Faridpur, Habiganj, Jessore, Mymensingh, Narayanganj, Rangpur, and Sylhet,** and at the **Narail** sub-centre of **Jessore Ashrama.**

**Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allahabad; Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; and Ramakrishna Mission, Khetri** held special programmes on 11 September in commemoration of Swamiji's address at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

On Swamiji's historic return from the West in January 1897, he had been given a grand reception at Thambyah Mudaliyar Chathiram, a pilgrims' resting place, in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

*Summer Camps at Hyderabad*







Summer Camp at Ponnampet

Later on, some more monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna had visited that place on different occasions. A memorial shrine dedicated to the Holy Trio was recently constructed there by **Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo**. Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, inaugurated the memorial on 7 August.

Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, unveiled the statue of Swamiji at the Ladysmith sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Durban, South Africa**, on 27 November 2016. On the same day a programme was held as a part of the centre's platinum jubilee and in commemoration of Sister Nivedita's 150th birth anniversary which was attended by about 500 people.

The statue of Swamiji at the Newcastle sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Durban** was unveiled on 30 July.

On 17 October 2017, Sri V K Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs, Government of India, inaugurated the kitchen-and-dining-hall building at a home for terminally ill patients in Inanda, South Africa. The building was constructed by the Phoenix sub-centre in **Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa**, which is in the process of becoming a full-fledged centre.

**Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago, Homer Glen, USA**, centre has started a city centre in Hyde Park, Chicago. Its address is '5555 S Everett Ave, Hyde Park, Chicago 60637, USA'.

**Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka, Bangladesh**, conducted a seminar on values education on 14 January which was

Medical Camp at Dhaka (Bangladesh) on 4 April 2017



Ramakrishna Mission Foundation Day Celebration at Dhaka







**Unveiling of Swami Vivekananda's Statue at the Ladysmith sub-centre of Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, Durban**

inaugurated by the Home Minister of Bangladesh, Mr Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, and attended by more than 600 persons, mainly youths.

The Dhaka ashrama celebrated its centenary by holding a series of programmes from 19 to 26 March. Sri Surendra Kumar Sinha, Chief Justice of Bangladesh, inaugurated the celebrations. Swami Suhitananda, then the General Secretary,

presided over the inaugural function. Special worship, homa, a youth convention, a women's convention, a procession, a conference of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Bhava Prasara Samad, feeding of the poor, a sadhu sammelan, a blood donation camp, an inter-religious convention, public meetings, release of books, and cultural programmes were parts of the celebration. A number of dignitaries including Srimat Swami Vagishanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Minister of Home Affairs Mr Asaduzzaman Khan, Minister of Commerce Mr Tofayel Ahmed, Minister of Agriculture Mrs Matia Chowdhury, and Minister of Water Resources Mr Anisul Islam Mahmud addressed the different meetings. Nearly 80 monastic brothers and a large number of people belonging to different faiths took part in the celebrations.

At the Dhaka ashrama, President of Bangladesh Mr Abdul Hamid, Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Mr Biren Sikder, Minister of Health and Family Welfare Mohammed Nasim, Minister of Road Transport and Bridges Mr Obaidul Quader, and several other distinguished

**Celebration in Commemoration of the Platinum Jubilee of Ladysmith Centre and Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary**



persons attended the Durga Puja celebration from 27 to 29 September. In all, about one lakh people attended the celebration.

The name of Chittagong (Bangladesh) centre has been changed from '**Ramakrishna Sevashrama, Chittagong**' to '**Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Chittagong**'.

The name of Sylhet (Bangladesh) centre has been changed from '**Ramakrishna Mission and Ashrama, Sylhet**' to '**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sylhet**'. Further, it may be noted that there is only a Mission centre, and no Math centre, at Sylhet.

The year-long silver jubilee celebration of Sarada Kindergarten of **Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore** was inaugurated on 23 September, and was attended by about 1,000 people. A commemorative volume was released on the occasion.

### ***Celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sister Nivedita***

**Antpur** centre held a seminar on Sister Nivedita on 26 March in which 180 persons participated.

The centre conducted a devotees' convention on 5 May in which about 250 devotees took part.

The centre conducted a youths' convention on 30 July in which 153 youths participated.

**Baghbazar** centre held a public meeting on 15 October which was attended by about 800 people. Swami Suvirananda presided over the meeting and released the Bengali book, *Bharat-chetanay Bhagini Nivedita*, published by the centre.

**Bamunmura Ashrama** conducted a devotees' convention on 12 February which was attended by 340 people. Also, a youths' convention was held on 19 March in which 336 delegates took part.

**Bankura** centre conducted a special lecture on 26 August which was attended by 120 students.

**Baranagar Math** held a students' orientation

programme on 23 January which was attended by about 100 students.

The centre held a students' convention on 10 September which was attended by 100 students.

**Baranagar Mission Ashrama** installed a statue of Sister Nivedita on its campus which was unveiled by Swami Suhitananda, then General Secretary, on 28 January. Besides, an exhibition on Sister Nivedita was set up on this occasion.

The Ashrama, in association with another organization in Kolkata, held a special lecture and a cultural programme on 16 July.

**Barisha Math** conducted a devotees' convention on 29 January which was attended by about 1,200 devotees.

The centre held a students' convention on 17 February in which 430 students and 65 teachers from 11 schools participated.

**Belgaum Ashrama** conducted a youths' convention on 28 October in which 750 college students took part.

**Burdwan** centre conducted a devotees' convention and a youths' convention on 12 and 13 June respectively in which altogether 550 people took part. Srimat Swami Suhitanandaji Maharaj presided over both the conventions.

**Chennai Math** in association with another organization held a day-long programme comprising lectures on 1 May in which about 300 women from different service organizations in Tamil Nadu took part.

The Chennai Math held a convention for students at Chengam in Thiruvannamalai district on 11 August; it was attended by about 200 students from 3 colleges and 3 schools.

The Chennai Math held a short story-writing competition in September and October in which 550 people took part. Prizes were distributed to the winners on 28 October. On the same day, the Math also held a refresher course for

teachers of our schools in Chennai in which 352 teachers took part. On 29 October, a special programme comprising a cultural event by spastic children, release of a Tamil biography of Sister Nivedita, and lectures was held. About 300 devotees attended the programme.

**Chennai Students' Home** hosted a district-level science exhibition on 31 August. The centre also conducted a four-day workshop on robotics for polytechnic students in which 100 students from 11 polytechnics took part. Participants exhibited their models on 16 September.

**Chennai Vidyapith** conducted public meetings and cultural competitions from 1 to 8 February in which about 5,000 students took part. A blood donation camp was also held in which 1,508 students donated blood.

**Coimbatore Math** held a programme on 4 March of speeches and a drama on Sister Nivedita, which was attended by about 450 people.

**Coimbatore Mission Vidyalaya** conducted quiz competitions and lectures at three rural schools near Coimbatore on 20 and 22 July. In all, 431 students took part in these programmes.

The Vidyalaya conducted quiz competitions and lectures at three villages near Coimbatore on 2 and 16 August. In all, 302 people, mainly students, took part in the programmes.

The Vidyalaya conducted quiz competitions

*Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration  
at Siliguri*



and lectures at three villages near Coimbatore on 3 and 9 September. In all, 328 people took part in the programmes.

**Contai** centre conducted a devotees' convention on 8 April in which 170 devotees took part.

**Cooch Behar** centre held a cultural programme on 30 June, attended by 750 people.

**Cossipore Math** held a youths' convention on 4 January in which about 1,500 people took part.

On 19 February, **Cuttack** sub-centre of **Ramakrishna Mission, Bhubaneswar**, held a seminar on Sister Nivedita in which 112 youths participated.

**Darjeeling** and **Jalpaiguri** centres jointly arranged a special programme at Siliguri on 31 March. A colourful procession, two public meetings and cultural events were held. In all, about 2,100 people attended the programme.

The centres jointly arranged special programmes comprising lectures and cultural events at Siliguri and Jalpaiguri on 1 and 2 July respectively which were attended altogether by about 1,600 people.

**Darjeeling** centre observed the birthday of Sister Nivedita on 28 October by holding cultural programmes. About 120 people visited the centre that day.

**Delhi** centre conducted a symposium on the topic 'Nationality: Basis of interfaith harmony'

*Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration  
Procession at Jalpaiguri*





on 25 January in which 22 speakers from different religions took part.

On 19 March, the Delhi centre conducted a drama on Sister Nivedita which was watched by about 300 persons.

The Delhi centre conducted an online competition in which 250 college students took part. The winners were given away prizes on 23 April.

The centre staged, in UK and Ireland, 11 puppet shows on Swamiji from 6 to 17 October which were attended altogether by about 2,000 people. The shows were sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, under Indo-UK Friendship Society programme, as part of Sister Nivedita's 150th birth anniversary celebrations. The centre also held a public meeting on its premises on 28 October which was presided over by Sri Ram Nath Kovind, President of India. Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj also spoke on the occasion. The meeting was attended by nearly 700 people.

**Gourhati** centre held a youths' convention and a devotees' convention on 21 and 22 January which were attended by 623 youths and 425 devotees respectively.

**Gurap** centre held on 18 June a day-long programme comprising lectures and a sitar recital. The programme was attended by about 500 people.

**Guwahati** centre conducted a meeting on 28

*Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration  
Football Tournament at Jalpaiguri*



October in which about 200 teachers and students participated.

**Hyderabad Math** conducted two two-day youth camps between 23 June and 1 July in which altogether 700 youths took part.

The centre held a youths' convention in Sathupalli town, Khammam district, on 26 October in which about 2,000 women from various colleges took part.

**Jalpaiguri** centre held a day-long programme comprising a procession, a youths' convention and a convention for general public on 1 April. In all, about 3,600 people took part in the programmes. The centre, in association with another institution, also held a football tournament from 10 to 16 April in which 8 teams took part.

**Jammu** centre conducted two lecture programmes on 28 October which were attended altogether by nearly 150 people, mostly youths.

On 29 October, Sri Raghavar Das, Chief Minister of Jharkhand, unveiled a statue of Sister Nivedita on the campus of two schools of **Jamshedpur** centre named after Sister Nivedita. The centre also conducted an essay-writing competition for the students of its various schools in which 1,075 students took part.

**Kadapa** centre held a teachers' workshop on 8, 9 and 10 September in which nearly 100 teachers participated.

*Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration  
at Guwahati*



On the initiative of **Kankurgachhi Math**, a procession and a youths' convention were held at Khanakul in Hooghly district on 9 and 10 January. About 3,000 people participated in the procession and 500 students in the convention.

The Kankurgachhi Math conducted a devotees' convention on 22 January which was attended by about 550 devotees.

On the initiative of the centre, a procession and a youths' convention were held at Patharpur in South 24 Parganas district on 5 and 6 May. About 400 students from 10 schools participated in the convention.

The Kankurgachhi Math held a seminar on Sister Nivedita at Khanakul in Hooghly district on 24 June which was attended by 350 students and teachers.

The Math held a special lecture on 18 June which was attended by 575 devotees.

The centre held four lectures in the month of October, which were attended altogether by 960 people.

**Karimganj** centre held a devotees' convention on 18 December in which 305 devotees took part.

**Kamarpukur** centre held the following events: a volunteers' convention on 3 February, a youths' convention on the 4th, a devotees'

convention on the 5th, and a farmers' fair from 7 to 9 February. In all, about 3,100 people attended the programmes.

**Kanpur** centre conducted cultural competitions and a lecture at a women's college in Jajmau, Kanpur, on 29 April.

**Koyilandy Math** conducted a programme comprising speeches and a cultural programme on 28 May which was attended by about 200 people.

**Lalgarh Math** held a procession, cultural competitions and a public meeting on 25 and 26 April; a good number of people participated in the programmes.

**Limbdī** centre held a music concert on 18 April which was attended by about 200 people.

**Lucknow** centre conducted a meeting and a seminar on 22 and 23 December. The two-day programme was inaugurated by Sri Ram Naik, Governor of Uttar Pradesh, and attended by about 700 people.

The centre held a youths' convention on 5 February in which 450 youths took part.

The Lucknow centre conducted a public meeting on 28 October which was attended by nearly 200 people.

**Madurai Math** conducted a personality

*Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration at Sri Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Vidyalaya, Chennai*





development camp for girls on 16 September in which 155 girls from a college took part.

The centre conducted a personality development camp on 14 October in which 175 students from a girls' school in Madurai took part.

**Malda** centre held special lectures on 18 March and a drama performance on Sister Nivedita on 19 March. In all, about 1,000 people attended these programmes.

**Manasadwip Ashrama** conducted a teachers' convention on 18 June in which 140 teachers from 54 schools of Sagar Island participated.

**Mangaluru** centre held a women empowerment programme on 13 January which was attended by about 700 girls.

**Medinipur** centre conducted a youths' convention on 19 January which was attended by about 400 students.

The centre held a students' convention for school girls on 16 September which was attended by about 350 girls.

**Mekhliganj Ashrama** conducted a music programme on 31 March.

**Mumbai** centre held a day-long programme comprising lectures and cultural events on 28 October which was attended by nearly 300 people.

**Mysuru** centre held a written quiz competition

on Sister Nivedita in which about 30,000 students from 320 schools participated. The winners were awarded prizes on 30 December.

The centre held a seminar on 18 March which was attended by 145 college students.

**Naora** centre held a programme on women empowerment on 28 April in which about 700 people participated.

**Narottam Nagar** centre conducted a cultural programme on 16 July which was attended by about 800 people.

The centre conducted quiz competitions in 11 schools of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in July and August, in which, in all, 717 students took part. The centre also held a public meeting on 2 September which was attended by 750 people.

**Ponnampet Ashrama** held a youths' convention and a spiritual retreat on 28 and 29 January participated by about 400 youths and 40 devotees.

The Ashrama held a public meeting on 20 May which was attended by about 200 people.

**Port Blair** centre conducted a youths' convention for MBBS students on 21 February in which about 350 people took part.

**Pune Math** held two youths' conventions on 16 and 17 September in which about 700 students took part.

*Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration*

*at Oakley House (now Nivedita Cottage) and Kakrighat, Almora on 28 October 2017*





**Puri Mission Ashrama** held written quiz competitions on Sister Nivedita in 10 schools in Odisha in January in which altogether 659 students took part. Besides, the Ashrama conducted meetings at two places in Nabarangpur district in Odisha on 21 and 22 January which were attended by about 1,000 persons in all, mostly youths. The centre also conducted a meeting on the Ashrama premises on 28 January which was attended by about 150 people.

The Ashrama conducted a youths' convention on 3 February and a devotees' convention on 4 and 5 February which were attended altogether by about 400 people. Besides, a written quiz competition and a public meeting were held at a school in Mayurbhanj district on 10 February in which about 400 students participated.

The Ashrama conducted a youths' convention on 24 March at Sri Jagannath Sanskrit University, Puri, in which 75 students participated.

The Puri Mission Ashrama held quiz competitions on Sister Nivedita at two places in the districts of Mayurbhanj and Khurda on 22 March and 23 April in which altogether 315 students participated. The Ashrama also conducted a seminar in Khurda district on 25 April which was attended by about 300 people.

**Raipur** centre held a symposium on 13 February which was attended by about 500 people.

**Rajamahendravaram** centre held cultural competitions in which 4,323 students from 39 schools took part. The winners were given away prizes on 28 February.

**Rajarhat Bishnupur** centre held cultural competitions and a youths' convention on 24 March in which altogether 450 students took part.

**Ramanathapuram** centre conducted a public meeting at a college in Ramanathapuram on 11 September in which 80 students and teachers participated.

**Ramharipur** centre held a rally from Ramharipur to Kamarpukur on 2 October in which 127 people took part.

**Ranchi Morabadi** centre held youths' conventions at four places in Ranchi and Khunti districts from 14 to 23 February. In all, about 1,500 youths took part in the conventions.

The centre conducted a devotees' convention on 19 March in which 275 devotees took part.

The Ashrama conducted a special programme on the theme 'Role of women farmers in enhancing family income through agriculture and allied activities' on 11 October in which about 300 women took part.

**Salem Ashrama** released a book on Sister Nivedita in Tamil in a function held on 28 July. About 250 students attended the programme.

*Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration at Manasadwip*



The Ashrama held programmes for students at six schools in and around Salem from 13 July to 8 August. In all, 1,472 boys and girls attended the programmes. The centre also conducted a youths' convention on 28 August in which 900 students from 12 colleges took part.

The Ashrama held cultural competitions from 17 to 24 August in which about 1,700 students from 30 schools in and around Salem participated. Prizes were given away to the winners on 3 September.

The Ashrama held a convention on 28 October, which was attended by nearly 200 people, mostly teachers from 16 schools.

**Saradapitha** conducted seminars in two girls' schools at Belur and Rahara on 17 and 18 August respectively. In all, about 500 students and 50 teachers took part in the seminars.

**Sarisha** centre held special lectures on 6 and 9 April. In all, about 2,700 people, comprising mainly students, attended the lectures.

The Sarisha Ashrama held a teachers' seminar on 1 July in which 65 teachers from different schools participated.

**Seva Pratishthan** held a special lecture on Sister Nivedita on 22 July which was attended by 450 persons.

**Silchar** centre conducted a students' and

teachers' convention on 24 and 25 May in which 210 students and 58 teachers from 36 schools took part.

The centre conducted a devotees' convention on 16 September which was attended by 570 devotees.

**Srinagar** centre held a music programme and a devotees' convention on 10 and 11 June in which altogether 125 people took part.

**Swamiji's Ancestral House** conducted two lectures at the centre on 31 December and 20 January which were attended altogether by 650 people. On the centre's initiative, a discourse was held at another place in Kolkata on 1 January which was attended by about 300 people.

The centre conducted two devotees' conventions and two lectures at the centre between 23 January and 17 February which were attended altogether by 1,400 people. On the centre's initiative, seven public meetings were held in and around Kolkata from 22 January to 18 February. In all, about 3,200 people attended the meetings.

The centre held two lectures on 27 February and 17 March at the centre which were attended altogether by 550 people. On the centre's initiative, six discourses were held in and around Kolkata from 20 February to 18 March. In all, about 3,150 people attended the meetings.

*Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration  
at Tirupati*



*Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration  
at Dhaka*



The centre conducted the following programmes: a lecture on 27 March, two music programmes on 29 and 31 March, and a seminar for students on 18 April. In all, 1,350 people attended these programmes. On the centre's initiative, two discourses were held in and around Kolkata on 26 March and 10 April which were attended by about 1,050 people.

The centre held four lectures and a drama between 24 April and 20 May at the centre which were attended altogether by 2,065 people. During the same period five discourses were held, on the centre's initiative, in and around Kolkata which were attended by 1,500 people in all.

The centre held four lectures between 29 May and 16 June at the centre which were attended altogether by 1,330 people. During the same period four discourses were held, on the centre's initiative, in and around Kolkata which were attended by 1,500 people in all.

On the initiative of Swamiji's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre, three discourses were held in and around Kolkata on 22, 26, and 27 June which were attended altogether by about 1,000 people.

The centre held four lectures between 28 July

and 9 August at the centre; they were attended altogether by 1,410 people. During the same period three discourses were conducted, on the centre's initiative, in and around Kolkata; in all, they were attended by about 1,000 people.

The centre held four lectures between 29 August and 6 September at the centre; they were attended altogether by 1,680 people. Further, on the centre's initiative, a lecture was conducted at a place in Kolkata on 20 August which was attended by about 300 people.

On the initiative of the Centre, six discourses were held in and around Kolkata between 23 September and 17 October, which were attended altogether by about 3,000 people.

Srimat Swami Vagishanandaji Maharaj formally inaugurated the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission's celebration of Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary in a function held at Swamiji's Ancestral House and Cultural Centre on 28 October. Swami Vagishanandaji, Dr Partha Chatterjee, Education Minister, Government of West Bengal, and Swami Suvarananda, among others, addressed the gathering. In the same function, sixteen volumes of Veda-grantha-mala, Bengali translation of the entire Vedas, to be published in fifty-seven volumes,

*Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration at Golpark, Kolkata*





brought out by the Institute of Culture, Gol Park, were also released. About 1,000 people, including monks and distinguished guests, attended the function.

As a sequel to the above function, two public meetings were held at the **Institute of Culture, Gol Park**, on 30 and 31 October, in which several eminent scholars spoke. The meetings were presided over by Swami Suvirananda and Swami Divyananda. In all, about 3,500 people attended the programmes on the two days.

**Tamluk** centre conducted the following programmes: (i) a students' convention on 10 September in which 500 students took part, (ii) a teachers' convention on 4 March in which 300 teachers participated, and (iii) cultural competitions from January to March in which about 8,000 students and teachers from 22 schools took part.

The Ashrama held a public meeting on 30 October which was attended by 600 people, mostly students.

**Tirupati** centre conducted an essay-writing competition in which 500 students of a women's degree college in Tirupati took part. The winners were awarded prizes on 25 March.

The centre held a symposium on 28 October, which was attended by nearly 250 students.

**Vadodara** centre held a public meeting at Kim in Surat district on 29 January in which Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj delivered benedictory address. About 1,000 people attended the programme.

The centre screened a film on Sister Nivedita on 6 April and staged a drama on her life on 18 April. In all, about 300 people watched the shows.

The centre conducted a seminar on 'youth empowerment and leadership' on 5 June which was attended by 200 people.

The centre conducted a seminar on Sister

Nivedita on 28 October in which 150 people took part.

**Varanasi Home of Service** conducted a classical music programme on 22 January which was attended by nearly 200 people.

The centre held cultural programmes on 23 and 26 February and 26 March.

The centre conducted a classical music programme on 27 July.

The centre conducted a devotional music programme on 27 August.

**Varanasi Advaita Ashrama** conducted a spiritual retreat on 23 April which was attended by 91 people.

**Vijayawada** centre conducted cultural competitions on 19 February in which 1,300 students from 50 schools of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states took part.

**Visakhapatnam Ashrama** conducted an educational conclave from 20 to 23 September which was inaugurated by Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj. About 1,500 students and 350 teachers attended the different conventions held as a part of the conclave.

The centre conducted a recitation competition from June to August in which nearly 13,000 students from 150 schools in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana participated. About 1,500 prizes were given away to the winners. On 28 October, a special programme was held at the centre to felicitate teachers and volunteers who had motivated a significant number of students to participate in the competitions.

**Chicago** and **St. Louis** centres (USA) jointly held a seminar on Sister Nivedita at Washington University, St. Louis, on 29 April which was attended by 75 people.

**Chicago** centre held, in association with the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, Lemont, a special programme comprising lectures and cultural programmes on 29 October.

**Durban (South Africa)** centre held three lectures at Pietermaritzburg sub-centre, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and the Indian Consulate in Johannesburg on 12, 17, and 20 May respectively. Altogether, 350 people attended the lectures.

**Sydney (Australia)** centre held a series of programmes comprising speeches and cultural events at Gold Coast, Brisbane, and Toowoomba cities, all in Queensland, Australia, from 26 to 28 May. In all, about 730 people attended the events.

**Vedanta Society, New York**, conducted an interfaith conference on 28 October which was attended by about 250 people. Sri Sandeep Chakravorty, Consul General of India in New York, inaugurated the conference.

On 12 November, Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal, unveiled a commemorative blue plaque installed by *English*

*Heritage*, a United Kingdom public charity that preserves and recognises historical buildings in that country. The blue plaque was installed on the building at 21, High Street, Wimbledon, London, where Sister Nivedita had stayed for some time. Swami Suhitandaji, Swami Dayatmananda, Head of Bourne End Centre, UK; Swami Purnananda, Head, Eire Vedanta Society, Dublin, Ireland; Swami Narasimhananda, Editor, *Prabuddha Bharata*; Marsie Skeete, Mayor of Merton; Anna Eavis, Curatorial Director, *English Heritage*; and several other dignitaries spoke at the event, and many devotees and admirers attended the programme. Among the attendees were the descendants of Sister Nivedita's family, Josephine MacLeod, Francis Leggett, and the members of the Lord Montagu family. A commemorative souvenir titled 'An Ode to Sister Nivedita' was released.

*Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration – Interfaith Conference at New York*





*Sister Nivedita's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebration – Unveiling of a Commemorative Blue Plaque*





### **Values Education and Youth Programmes**

On 22 July, **Bengaluru Math** conducted a convention on imparting values education to students in which about 100 college lecturers and principals took part.

**Cooch Behar** centre held a youths' convention on 3 April in which 229 students and 18 teachers took part.

**Delhi** centre held five values education workshops from 28 December to 25 January which were attended by 405 principals and teachers. The workshops were held at Ghaziabad, Jaipur, Bhopal, Indore, and Delhi.

The centre held five values education workshops for school principals from 2 to 15 February which were attended by 461 principals. The workshops were held at Chandigarh, Mumbai, Varanasi, Chennai, and Ahmedabad.

The centre held 7 values education workshops from 14 to 25 March which were attended by 454 principals and teachers. The workshops were held at Bihar, Delhi, Karnataka, and Madhya Pradesh.

The centre held 30 values education workshops from 3 to 29 April which were attended by 2,675 principals and teachers. The workshops were held in nine states apart from Delhi.

The Delhi centre held 9 values education workshops from 1 to 18 May which were attended by 445 principals and teachers. The workshops were held in five states apart from Delhi.

The centre held 16 values education workshops from 5 to 29 June which were attended by 958 principals and teachers. The workshops were held in 10 states apart from Delhi.

The centre held 26 values education workshops from 29 June to 29 July which were attended by 1,624 principals and teachers. The workshops were held in 8 states apart from Delhi.

The centre held 16 values education workshops from 2 to 30 August which were attended

by 990 teachers and 70 principals. The workshops were held in 8 states apart from Chandigarh and Delhi.

The centre held 4 values education workshops at Kathmandu (Nepal), Pushkar, Lucknow, and Ranchi from 1 to 13 September which were attended by 276 teachers and principals.

The Delhi centre held 13 values education workshops from 25 September to 27 October, which were attended by 347 teachers. The workshops were held in 5 states apart from Delhi.

**Halasuru Math** conducted values education programmes at 50 schools in Bellary district in January.

**Haripad Math** conducted meetings on values education at four schools from 20 to 23 November in which 453 students participated.

**Hyderabad Math** held a youth camp on 24 and 25 December in which 321 youths participated.

The Math held a personality development programme for MBBS students on 5 March in which 400 students from 11 medical colleges took part. The centre also conducted a cultural competition on 10 March in which 4,000 students participated. About 450 winners of the competition attended a convention held on 2 April.

**Jalpaiguri** centre, together with **Kankurgachhi Math**, held values education workshops at 24 educational institutions in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts from 4 to 8 April. In all, 800 students took part in the workshops.

The Jalpaiguri centre held a values education workshop at Konpakri in Jalpaiguri district which was attended by 170 students.

The Ashrama held a convention for drivers of public transport vehicles on 27 August in which 168 drivers took part.

**Kankurgachhi Math** conducted a values education workshop at Ramnagar in Hooghly district on 23 June which was attended by 175 students and teachers.

**Khetri** centre held seven values education workshops in four schools from 20 to 24 January in which 470 students and 16 teachers took part.

**Kochi** centre held a youth camp on the theme 'Personality Development' from 8 to 11 June in which 30 youths took part.

**Madurai** centre conducted a personality development camp on 5 October in which 175 college students took part.

**Mangaluru** centre conducted values education programmes at 7 educational institutions from 9 to 13 February in which 1,350 students participated. The centre also held, in the same period, 6 workshops for housewives at different localities in Mangaluru which were attended altogether by about 2,500 women.

The centre conducted three values education seminars on 7, 8, and 9 September, for college lecturers, postgraduate students, and teacher trainees respectively. In all, about 1,300 people participated in the seminars.

**Mekhliganj** centre conducted a youths' convention on 3 September in which nearly 100 students took part.

**Nagpur Math** conducted a convention for women students on 22 December in which about 800 students studying in different colleges and 50 professors participated.

The ashrama conducted cultural competitions based on the teachings of Swamiji in January and February in which about 15,000 students from nearly 100 schools took part.

**Purulia Vidyapith** conducted a residential camp on values education from 29 May to 1 June in which 86 tribal students participated.

**Ranchi Morabadi** centre held students' conventions at four educational institutions located in different blocks of Ranchi district from 3 to 10 February, in which 1,231 students took part.

**Silchar** centre held two students' conventions on 14 and 15 September in which altogether 709

*Special Workshop on Value Education from 4 to 8 April 2017 in Jalpaiguri*



students and 69 teachers from 47 schools and colleges took part.

**Tamluk Ashrama** held a youths' convention on 1 September which was attended by about 400 people.

**Vadodara** centre conducted a written quiz competition on Swamiji in which 64,917 students from 787 schools in Gujarat took part. State and district level toppers were awarded prizes on 5 February.

The centre conducted two values education programmes on 4 and 5 January which were attended altogether by about 250 academicians.

**Vijayawada** centre held a symposium on personality development on 15 September in which 400 students from four colleges took part.

The centre held a symposium on personality development on 17 October in which 305 students from four colleges took part.

### **Swachchha Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign)**

**Bankura** centre held a cleanliness drive on 13 August in which the campus of a hospital was cleaned.

Polytechnic students of **Chennai Students'**

**Home** cleaned Marina Beach in Chennai on 16 January, following the Pongal celebration there. On 12 February, the centre held a cleaning programme in which about 25 former students of the institution cleaned a few public streets.

Vivekananda College of **Chennai Vidyapith** secured third position under the colleges category in the all-India Swachchhata rankings for higher educational institutions released by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

**Chennai Math** conducted a cleanliness drive at a government-run rehabilitation centre for Leprosy Cured but Disabled Persons (LCDPs) located at Paranur, near Chengalpattu, on 2 October. Thirty-five LCDPs and some volunteers took part in the drive. They also dressed the wounds of 75 patients in the rehabilitation centre.

**Coimbatore Mission Vidyalaya** conducted four cleaning drives in January in which Vidyalaya students cleaned a few public places including a temple, a hospital and a government office.

The Vidyalaya conducted four cleaning drives in February in which Vidyalaya students cleaned some public places including a school and the premises of a forest range office.

*Third Phase of Swachchha Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign) at Mangalore*





The Vidyalaya conducted six cleaning drives in March in which the Vidyalaya students cleaned some public places including a school, a hospital and two government offices.

The Vidyalaya conducted four cleaning drives in June in which the Vidyalaya students cleaned some public places including a school and two government offices.

The Vidyalaya conducted five cleaning drives between 5 and 18 July in which the Vidyalaya students cleaned some public places including a hospital and two government offices.

The Vidyalaya conducted four cleaning drives between 1 and 12 August in which the Vidyalaya students cleaned some public places including a temple.

The Vidyalaya conducted four cleaning drives between 9 and 19 September in which the Vidyalaya students cleaned some public places, including the premises of a hospital and a police station.

The Vidyalaya conducted two cleaning drives on 4 and 12 October in which the Vidyalaya students cleaned the premises of two government offices.

**Delhi** centre constructed 100 toilets of the

twin-pit-pour-flush type at Bhati Mines, Delhi. Sri Rao Inderjit Singh, Minister of State for Urban Development, Government of India, declared open the toilets on 1 March.

**Kamarpukur** centre carried out three cleanliness drives from November to January in which several monks, employees, and volunteers participated.

The centre carried out a cleanliness drives on 19 February: 57 people participated; 26 March: 88 people participated; 23 April: 88 people participated; The centre carried out a cleanliness drives on 21 May, 25 June, 24 September, 29 October at Kamarpukur village.

**Mangaluru** centre conducted altogether 46 cleaning drives in and around Mangaluru on the five Sundays in January. In all, 6,500 volunteers actively participated in these drives.

The centre held the following events in February: (i) Thirty-seven cleaning drives in and around Mangaluru on four Sundays in which altogether 5,300 volunteers participated, (ii) A day-long art camp on 11 February to create awareness among students about cleanliness in which 150 students took part, and (iii) A rally, attended by about 1,500 people, on 19 February

*Third Phase of Swachhha Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign) at Mangalore*



to mark completion of 200 drives in the ongoing third phase of Swachchha Mangaluru.

The centre held 52 cleaning drives in and around Mangaluru on four Sundays in March in which altogether 5,400 volunteers participated.

The centre conducted 70 cleaning drives in and around Mangaluru on five Sundays in the month of April in which altogether 4,860 volunteers participated. The centre also held seminars in four educational institutions from 2 to 5 April in which 1,200 youths took part.

The centre conducted 42 cleaning drives in and around Mangaluru on four Sundays in the month of May in which a large number of volunteers took part. The centre also held a workshop on 28 May in which 225 Panchayat Development Officers and representatives of different Panchayats of Dakshina Kannada district participated.

**Mysuru Ashrama** launched Swachchha Mysuru Swachchha Jeevana programme on 29 January to bring public awareness about cleanliness and environmental protection. A team of 230 volunteers and 80 students carried out cleanliness and awareness drive at 7 localities in the city that day.

The Ashrama conducted seven cleaning drives

between 5 February and 26 March in which about 600 volunteers cleaned different localities of the city. On 27 February, 300 sweepers working for Mysuru City Corporation were felicitated. Besides, programmes to spread awareness among students about cleanliness were held in 6 educational institutions from 27 January to 3 March which were attended by nearly 900 students.

The Ashrama conducted four cleaning drives between 2 and 23 April in which about 1,200 volunteers took part. Besides, programmes to spread awareness about cleanliness were held.

The Ashrama conducted five cleaning drives between 30 April and 28 May in which a number of volunteers cleaned five localities of the city.

The Ashrama conducted eight cleaning drives between 4 June and 30 July in which a number of volunteers cleaned eight localities of the city.

The Ashrama conducted three cleaning drives on 6, 20 and 27 August in which a number of volunteers cleaned different parts of the city. Besides cleaning, volunteers campaigned to spread awareness about cleanliness by visiting homes and commercial establishments.

**Ramharipur** centre held a cleanliness drive on 2 September in which the campus of a primary health centre was cleaned.

*Third Phase of Swachchha Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Campaign) at Mysuru*



**Varanasi Home of Service** carried out a cleanliness drive on 15 January in which 45 people took part. A rally, attended by 300 people, was also taken out to create awareness about cleanliness.

The centre carried out a cleanliness drive along with a rally to create awareness about cleanliness, on 26 February participated by 250 people.

### **Celebration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Abhedanandaji Maharaj**

**Baranagar Math** held a public meeting on 23 April which was attended by about 100 people.

On 23 April, **Lucknow** centre conducted a spiritual retreat which was attended by about 300 devotees, and a special programme for youths in which nearly 120 youths took part.

**Nagpur Math** held a public meeting on 6 March which was attended by about 500 people.

**Swamiji's Ancestral House** conducted a special lecture on 10 February which was attended by about 300 people.

The centre conducted a special lecture on 9 March which was attended by about 250 people.

**Vadodara** centre held a meditation camp on 26 February in which 80 people participated.

The centre held a spiritual retreat on 16 April in which 110 persons participated.

### **Relief**

**Winter Relief:** 12,372 blankets were distributed to poor people through the following centres: **Agartala:** 300, from 4 December to 12 February; **Almora:** 304, from 20 December to 20 February; **Antpur:** 1,310, from 1 to 31 December; **Baghbazar:** 250, on 27 November; **Bamunmura:** 281, from 25 December to 11 February; **Baranagar Math:** 300, 8 December; **Burdwan (Headquarters):** 100, from 31 January to 10 February; **Gourhati:** 300, from 17 December to 5 February; **Ichapur:** 300, from 4 to 10 December; **Jamshedpur:** 500, from 13 November to 29 January; **Jayrambati:** 2,950, from 14 December to 18 January; **Kankurgachhi:** 522, 13 November to 9 January; **Khetri:** 100, 26 February; **Koalpara (Jayrambati):** 650, from 10 to 23 December; **Naora:** 650, from 20 November to 23 January; **Rahara:** 60, in February; **Srinagar:** 200, from 13 November to 24 December; **Taki:** 300, from 2 December to 19 January; **Varanasi Home of Service:** 100, on 18 December; **Bangladesh: Dhaka:** 1,825, on 28 January; **Jessore:** 1,070, from 16 December to 17 February.

*Winter Relief by Agartala Ashrama*



*Winter Relief by Bhubaneswar Ashrama*





6,307 blankets were distributed to poor people through the following centres: **Aalo:** 459, from 20 December to 24 March; **Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata:** 181, from 26 November to 25 December; **Baranagar Mission:** 300, on 21 December and 28 February; **Belagavi (Belgaum):** 300, from 19 to 25 December; **Belgharia:** 300, from 24 December to 12 January; **Contai:** 250, from 26 December to 8 January; **Deoghar:** 400, from 14 December to 8 February; **Garbeta:** 600, from 26 December to 7 January; **Katihar:** 200, from 28 January to 26 February; **Lalgarh:** 300, from 21 November to 28 January; **Mayavati:** 431, from 11 December to 3 March; **Narendrapur:** 300, on 9 and 29 December; **Rajarhat Bishnupur:** 500, from 7 to 31 December; **Sargachhi:** 300, from 1 December to 5 January; **Shyamla Tal:** 975, from 30 September to 14 December; **Silchar:** 511, from 24 January to 23 February.

Besides, the following centres distributed various winter garments, mentioned against their names, to needy people: India: **Almora:** 45 sweaters from 20 December to 20 February; **Antpur:** 890 sweaters and 500 mufflers from 22 November to 31 January; **Belgharia:** 1,000 sweaters, 1,000 sweatshirts, and 1,000 jackets

from 27 September to 19 January; **Bhubaneswar:** 520 sweaters from 1 December to 28 February; **Burdwan (Headquarters):** 120 jackets from 31 January to 10 February; **Chandipur:** 34 mufflers from 13 to 19 February; **Chandipur:** 17 mufflers from 11 to 13 March; **Cherrapunjee:** 3,258 sweaters and 5,046 jackets from 14 November to 28 December; **Contai:** 100 mufflers from 26 December to 8 January; **Garbeta:** 1,961 sweaters from 3 December to 10 February; **Ichapur:** 799 sweaters and 500 mufflers from 15 January to 28 February; **Itanagar:** 327 sweaters and 911 jackets from 25 December to 26 February; **Jalpaiguri:** 1,046 sweaters from 10 December to 20 February; **Kamarpukur:** 1,500 mufflers from 9 December to 26 February; 1,236 jackets, 151 sweatshirts, and 104 coats from 22 December to 26 February; **Karimganj:** 848 sweaters from 26 November to 10 February; **Katihar:** 105 sweaters and 220 jackets from 29 January to 20 March; **Khetri:** 1,422 sweaters from 27 January to 23 February; **Mayavati:** 411 sweaters, 475 coats, 809 mufflers, and 1,779 jackets from 4 December to 6 March; **Narottam Nagar:** 43 sweaters, 100 shawls, and 661 sweatshirts from 22 February to 28 March; **Ponnampet:** 286 jackets,

*Garments Distribution by Puri Ashrama*



*Garments Distribution  
by Narottam Nagar Ashrama, Arunachal Pradesh*



770 sweaters, and 200 sweatshirts from 28 January to 8 March; **Puri Mission**: 280 sweaters from 15 to 22 January; **Rahara**: 1,000 sweaters, 598 sweatshirts, and 417 jackets from 12 December to 5 February; **Rajarhat Bishnupur**: 120 jackets from 7 to 31 December; **Ranchi Morabadi**: 479 sweaters and 2,682 jackets from 19 December to 13 February; **Saradapitha**: 152 sweaters and 402 jackets from 3 to 8 January; **Shimla**: 466 sweaters, 310 sweatshirts, 219 jackets, and 494 mufflers from 12 December to 20 January; **Sikra Kulingram**: 302 jackets from 9 November to 4 January; **Vivekananda University**: 724 sweaters, 191 jackets, 36 sweatshirts, and 9 coats from 14 January to 18 February; **Bangladesh: Jessore**: 250 sweaters from 16 December to 17 February.

The following centres distributed blankets or winter garments, mentioned against their names, to needy people: **Antpur**: 428 sweaters, 749 sweatshirts, and 1,395 jackets from 23 August to 9 September; **Bankura**: 503 blankets from 16 December to 29 March; 723 sweaters from 3 to 18 May; **Burdwan**: 250 blankets and 190 baby-blankets on 3 and 5 July; **Cossipore**: 300 blankets from 10 to 19 September; **Darjeeling**: 40 sweaters, 51 jackets and 80 blankets on 10 August;

**Gourhati**: 75 sweaters on 28 May; **Itanagar**: 202 jackets on 25 May and 24 June; **Karimganj**: 104 blankets on 10 May; **Khetri**: 55 blankets on 22 October; **Ooty**: 300 blankets from 28 June to 20 July; **Patna**: 569 sweatshirts, 1,961 sweaters, and 2,031 jackets from 22 August to 17 September; **Sarisha**: 300 blankets on 8 February; **Shimla**: 11 sweaters and 40 jackets from 1 April to 11 May.

**Flood Relief: Assam**: In the wake of floods in many areas of Assam, **Guwahati** centre distributed the following items to 628 affected families in Morigaon and Darang districts on 15, 18, and 20 July: 150 buns, 204 bananas, 550 packets of biscuits, 371 saris, 110 dhotis, and 466 mosquito-nets. Besides, the centre provided medical relief to 540 flood-affected patients.

The **Guwahati** centre distributed 1,000 buns, 500 packets of biscuits, 460 saris, 375 dhotis, 100 lungis, 500 mosquito-nets, 3,000 candles, and 600 packets of matchboxes among 473 flood-affected families at Laukhowa village of Bhurbadha block in Nagaon district on 20 August.

In the wake of devastating floods in Dhemaji district, the **Itanagar** centre distributed 600 ration kits—each kit containing 10 kg rice, 5 kg dal, 5 kg potatoes, 1 kg cooking oil, 1 kg salt, 500

Winter Relief by Jaipur Ashrama



Winter Relief by Kamarpukur Ashrama





gram milk powder, 2 packets of candles, 1 packet of matchboxes, 500 grams of detergent powder, and 2 bars of soap—to 600 affected families on 14 September.

**Bihar:** **Patna** centre distributed 6,480 saris, 6,000 dhotis, 960 jackets, and 1,000 blankets among 2,950 flood-affected families in Patna and Rajgir districts from 30 September to 1 December. **Katihar** centre distributed 6,530 kg chira (rice flakes), 285 kg sugar, 413 kg gur (molasses), 700 packets of biscuits, 350 litres of drinking water, 570 polythene sheets, 4,716 candles, 700 torches and 4,146 matchboxes among 1,866 flood-affected families of 22 villages in Katihar district from 19 to 25 August. **Muzaffarpur** centre served 2,500 plates of cooked food and distributed 1,500 kg chira (rice flakes) and 400 kg gur (molasses) among 3,285 flood-affected persons in Minapur and Mushahari blocks of Muzaffarpur district from 26 August to 27 September.

**Gujarat:** (a) **Rajkot** centre served cooked food to 17,600 affected people of Maliya and Mitana villages in Morbi district whose houses had been inundated. The centre distributed 336 educational kits—each kit containing a school bag, a geometry box, 3 notebooks—among flood-affected students of Maliya and Mitana villages in Morbi district on 10 August. (b) **Limbdi** centre provided food packets, biscuits, milk and plastic sheets to about

520 flood-affected people in and around Limbdi. The centre served 3,125 plates of cooked food, 212 litres of milk, and 2,625 packets of assorted snacks to 625 people in various places of Limbdi taluk from 27 to 31 July. (c) **Vadodara** centre distributed 3,000 food packets and 294 ration kits—each kit containing 10 kg rice, 10 kg flour, 3 kg dal, 2 kg Bengal gram, 400 gram assorted spices, 1 kg salt, 1 kg edible oil, 3 packets of biscuits, 500 gram namkeen, 500 gram milk powder, 100 gram tea leaves, 1 kg sugar, 12 candles, 1 packet of matchbox, and 1 tarpaulin sheet—among flood-affected people in 14 villages of Banaskantha district on 29 and 30 July. The centre distributed 9,019 kg rice, 10,328 kg flour, 2,671 kg dal, 1,442 kg gram, 1,004 kg edible oil, 333 kg assorted spices, 721 kg salt, 389 kg farsan (snacks), 2,730 packets of biscuits, 360 kg milk powder, 72 kg tea leaves, 721 kg sugar, 8,652 candles, 721 matchboxes, 567 plates, 567 bowls, 567 tumblers, 721 tarpaulins, and 50 hand-carts among 1,782 flood-affected families, and 1,700 educational kits—each kit containing a school bag, a geometry box, writing materials, notebooks, crayons—among poor and needy students of 60 villages in Banaskantha and Patan districts from 31 July to 15 August.

**Uttar Pradesh:** **Lucknow** centre served 4,280 food packets and distributed 6,500 kg rice, 1,300 kg dal, 2,080 kg salt, 1,500 kg chira, 300 kg

Winter Relief by Kankurgachhi Ashrama



Winter Relief by Medinipur Ashrama





sugar, 5,000 litres of drinking water, 5,432 candles, 4,580 packets of matchboxes, 1,008 saris, 465 shirts, 600 T-shirts, 1040 pants, 2,386 children's garments, 208 mosquito-nets, and 617 tarpaulins among 2,620 flood-affected families of 41 villages in Gonda, Barabanki, Balarampur, and Faizabad districts from 7 to 28 August.

**Lucknow** centre distributed 375 kg salt, 2,316 saris, 1,750 tops, 6,211 trousers, 4,185 shirts, 5,405 children's garments, 603 mosquito-nets, 8 kg chlorine tablets, 6,888 candles, and a tarpaulin among 4,708 flood-affected families of 87 villages in Gonda, Barabanki, Balarampur, Basti, and Faizabad districts from 29 August to 25 September.

**West Bengal:** (a) **The Headquarters (Belur Math)** distributed 20,000 kg chira, 3,500 kg sugar, 22,000 packets of biscuits, 408 kg milk powder, 496 tarpaulins, 179 plastic sheets, and 1.8 lakh halogen tablets among 8,988 flood-affected families belonging to 43 villages of Man-suka and Ghatal blocks in Paschim Medinipur district from 1 to 8 August. **The Headquarters (Belur Math)** served 10,000 plates of cooked food and distributed 7,250 kg rice, 2,050 kg potatoes, 1,725 packets of biscuits, 500 litres of drinking water, 1,800 saris, 1,030 lungis, 522 dhotis, 1 lakh halogen tablets, 215 bags of cattle feed, and 125 kg bleaching powder among 1,275 flood-affected families of 14 villages in Uttar Dinajpur district

from 31 August to 16 September. Moreover, medical help was provided to 364 patients. (b) **Antpur** centre distributed 50,275 kg chira, 1,200 kg sugar, 1 lakh halogen tablets, and 100 kg bleaching powder among 29,186 families belonging to 107 villages of Jangipara, Pursurah, Khanakul-1, and Khanakul-2 blocks in Hooghly district, and Udaynarayanpur and Amta-2 blocks in Howrah district from 26 July to 7 August. (c) **Belgharia** centre distributed 27,000 kg chira, 3,800 kg sugar, 1,000 loaves of bread, 7,570 packets of biscuits, 780 kg milk powder, 400 kg bleaching powder, 200 plastic sheets, and 2.7 lakh halogen tablets among 4,022 families belonging to 18 villages of Daspur-1 and Daspur-2 blocks in Paschim Medinipur district from 28 July to 7 August. The centre also held three medical camps in that region on 27 August in which 909 flood-affected patients were treated. (d) **Cooch Behar** centre served 11,945 plates of cooked food to 1,590 flood-affected families of 7 villages in Cooch Behar district from 13 to 16 August. **Cooch Behar** centre served cooked food to a few thousand flood-affected persons and distributed 550 kg rice, 53 kg dal, 187 kg chira (rice flakes), 60 kg gur (molasses), and 96 kg muri (puffed rice) among 1,252 families of 22 villages in Cooch Behar district from 13 to 16 August. (e) **Gadadhar Ashrama** served cooked food to 850 flood-affected people and distributed 550 kg chira,

Winter Relief by Shimla Ashrama



Winter Relief by Vrindavan Ashrama



100 kg sugar, 40 kg sattu (gram flour), 450 packets of biscuits, 35 saris, 60 dhotis, and 80 kg bleaching powder among 250 families of Saibona village in Khanakul-1 block of Hooghly district on 12 August. (f) **Gourhati** centre distributed 7,300 kg chira, 820 kg sugar, 1,500 packets of biscuits, 1,104 candles, 2,000 packets of matchboxes, 1,500 saris, 320 tarpaulins, 180 plastic sheets, and 50,000 halogen tablets among 4,336 flood-affected families of 15 villages in Arambagh, Khanakul-1, and Khanakul-2 blocks of Hooghly district from 28 July to 12 August. (g) **Ichapur** centre distributed 20,000 kg chira, 2,500 kg sugar, 27 tarpaulins, 179 plastic sheets, 100 kg bleaching powder, and 1 lakh halogen tablets among 10,484 flood-affected families of 33 villages in Hooghly and Paschim Medinipur districts from 27 July to 6 August. (h) **Jalpaiguri** and **Darjeeling** centres distributed 3,907 kg rice, 757 kg dal, 757 kg potatoes, 757 kg mustard oil, 454 kg salt, 225 kg bleaching powder, and 225 kg lime among 907 flood-affected families in Raiganj, Kaliyaganj, and Buniyadpur areas in North Dinajpur district from 20 to 26 August. **Jalpaiguri** and **Darjeeling** centres distributed 43 kg dal, 143 kg potatoes, 30 kg soybeans, 200 kg assorted spices, 243 kg mustard oil, 300 packets of biscuits, 2,800 dhotis, 4,600 saris, 300

kg bleaching powder, 375 kg lime, 700 educational kits—each kit consisting of four notebooks, a pen, an eraser, and a pencil—and 300 packets of candles among 1,893 flood-affected families in North Dinajpur district from 1 to 24 September. (i) **Jayrambati** centre distributed 6,000 kg chira, 1,100 kg sugar, 200 kg milk powder, 150 kg rice, 150 kg dal, and 2,400 packets of biscuits among 2,200 flood-affected families of 14 villages in Daspur-1 block of Paschim Medinipur district from 4 to 8 August. (j) **Kamarpukur** centre distributed 11,550 kg chira, 1,173 kg sugar, 269 kg biscuits, 1,500 saris, 1,500 dhotis, 100 plastic sheets, 100 tarpaulins, 100 kg bleaching powder, and 1 lakh halogen tablets among 10,495 flood-affected families of 47 villages in Pursurah, Goghat, Khanakul-1, and Khanakul-2 blocks of Hooghly district from 30 July to 19 August. (k) **Malda** centre distributed 5,000 kg chira, 500 kg sugar, 1,000 packets of biscuits, and 200 kg milk powder among 1,000 flood-affected families of Bamangola block in Malda district from 16 to 18 August. (l) **Malda** centre distributed 7,000 kg chira, 750 kg sugar, 720 kg rice, 120 kg dal, and 3,160 packets of biscuits among 1,568 flood-affected families in Malda district from 19 August to 6 September. (m) **Narendrapur** centre distributed 660 kg rice, 660 kg potatoes, 110 kg dal, 110

*Cyclone Relief by Chennai Students' Home*



*Distress Relief by Chennai Students' Home*





kg muri, 552 packets of biscuits, 175 kg bleaching powder, 25 water drums, and 557 tarpaulins among 773 families in South 24-Parganas and Paschim Medinipur districts. (n) **Saradapitha** centre distributed 1,700 kg chira, 800 kg sugar, 675 kg rice, 200 kg dal, 500 kg potatoes, 4,696 packets of biscuits, 30 kg muri (puffed rice), 240 kg milk powder, 1,200 litres of drinking water and 106 tarpaulins among 1,435 flood-affected families of 12 villages in Amta-2 block of Howrah district from 29 July to 18 August. The centre also distributed 150 litres of bottled drinking water among 50 families in Howrah Municipality on 11 July.

**Bangladesh:** In the wake of floods in some areas of Sunamganj district, **Dhaka** centre distributed 500 saris, 300 dhotis, 500 lungis, 2,000 packets of ORS, 250 plates, 250 bowls, and 250 tumblers among 500 affected families on 23 May.

The centre distributed 100 saris, 100 lungis, 200 dhotis, 10 plates, 20 bowls, and 10 tumblers among 215 flood-affected families of Kalma-kanda upazila in Netrakona district on 8 June.

The **Dinajpur** centre served cooked food and distributed 90 kg chira and 10 kg gur among 7,000 flood-affected persons in various areas of Dinajpur district from 13 to 17 August.

**Dhaka** centre provided the following items

to each of the 250 flood-affected families in Dinajpur district on 5 and 6 September: 1 kg flour, 1 kg suji (semolina), 1 kg sugar, 1 litre edible oil, 1 sari, and 1 lungi.

The **Dhaka** centre distributed 600 kg suji (semolina), 600 kg flour, 600 litres of edible oil, 600 kg sugar, 600 saris, 400 lungis, and 200 dhotis among 600 families of Sunamganj, Kuri-gram and Netrakona districts on 22 September and 4 and 6 October respectively.

**Sri Lanka:** In the wake of floods in many areas of southern Sri Lanka, **Colombo** centre distributed the following items to 72 affected families and 39 needy students in Hulandawa and Akuressa areas on 1 and 25 June: 284 kg noodles, 240 kg milk powder, 144 kg sugar, 23 kg baby food, 723 packets of biscuits, 137 kg of processed cereals, 160 packets of tooth powder, 168 ladies garments, 146 school uniforms, 1,044 exercise books, 191 pens, 87 pencils, 73 erasers, 73 sharpeners, 73 school bags, 1,020 matchboxes, 140 packets of candles, 215 bedsheets, 292 mats, 85 buckets, 85 mugs, 4 tarpaulins, and 92 solar lamps.

**Storm Relief: Assam:** On 7 May, **Guwahati** centre distributed 63 CGI sheets to 7 families at Gotanagar-Maligaon area in Guwahati whose houses had been damaged by a cyclonic storm.

*Drought Rehabilitation by Chennai Students' Home*



*Flood Relief by Chapra Ashrama, Bihar*





**Summer Relief: Telangana: Hyderabad** centre served about 1.70 lakh glasses of buttermilk and 1.20 lakh glasses of drinking water to thirsty wayfarers in Hyderabad city and Karimnagar and Mahbubnagar districts from 28 March to 28 May.

**Tamil Nadu:** The following centres served buttermilk to thirsty wayfarers: (a) **Chennai Mission Ashrama:** 21,700 litres of buttermilk from 1 to 31 May. (b) **Salem:** 19,500 litres of buttermilk from 23 April to 1 June.

**Cyclone Relief:** West Bengal: From 2 May to 13 June, Ramharipur centre distributed the following building materials among 46 families of 13 villages in Bankura district whose houses had been damaged by a cyclone: 256 matkas, 28 tin sheets, 618 asbestos sheets, 388 chalkaths, and 457 batams.

**Landslide Relief: Arunachal Pradesh:** Subsequent to a landslide at Kabu Masi village in West Siang district, **Aalo** centre distributed 16 blankets, 4 sets of utensils—each set containing 4 plates, 4 bowls, two cooking pots, a kettle, a bucket, a ladle, a jug, a tumbler, and a mug—and stationery items—notebooks, pens, pencils—among 4 affected families on 16 July.

In response to a landslide in Pak Gumin village in West Siang district, **Aalo** centre distributed 11 blankets, a set of utensils—a karahi, 4 plates, 4 bowls, a pot, a kettle, a bucket, a ladle, a jug, a tumbler, and a mug—and stationery items—notebooks, pens, pencils—to a family on 1 August.

**Distress Relief:** The following centres distributed various items, as shown against their names, to needy people: (a) **Antpur:** 1,531 shirts, 1,364 pants, 200 dhotis, 1,057 tops, 850 saris, and 1,000 pairs of socks from 1 October to 31 January. (b) **Asansol:** 499 tin-sheets from 24 January to 11 February. (c) **Belgharia:** 1,586 shirts, 968 T-shirts, 2,936 pants, and 1,472 tops from 27 September to 19 January. (d) **Burdwan (Headquarters):** 150 saris, 200 dhotis, and 300 uttaris from 31 January to 10 February. (e) **Chandipur:** 79 shirts, 25

dhotis, and 65 pairs of socks from 12 to 18 February. (f) **Guwahati:** 1,060 shirts, 213 pants, and 244 tops from 12 to 31 January. (g) **Jalpaiguri:** 1,520 shirts, 1,303 pants, and 812 tops from 10 December to 20 February. (h) **Jayrambati:** 2,758 shirts, 2,943 pants, and 4,150 saris from 14 December to 13 February. (i) **Kamarpukur:** 3,500 pairs of socks from 9 December to 26 February. (j) **Karimganj:** 1,000 shirts, 1,457 pants, and 1,005 tops from 26 November to 10 February. (k) **Khetri:** 1,641 shirts, 1,535 T-shirts, 3,177 pants, 1,587 tops, and 1,500 pairs of socks from 27 January to 23 February. (l) **Koalpara (Jayrambati):** 930 saris from 10 to 23 December. (m) **Nattarampalli:** 529 shirts and 890 pants from 3 November to 22 January. (n) **Puri Mission:** 1,045 shirts, 986 T-shirts, and 2,002 pants from 8 November to 22 January. (o) **Rahara:** 633 shirts, 1,191 pants, 86 dhotis, 1,260 tops, and 7 saris from 12 December to 5 February. (p) **Saradapitha:** 1.74 lakh halogen tablets on 28 January and 8 February. (q) **Sikra Kulingram:** 210 shirts from 9 November to 8 January. (r) **Silchar:** 8,007 shirts and 2,601 pants from 29 December to 23 February. (s) **Vijayawada:** 578 shirts, 367 T-shirts, and 1,420 pants from 1 August to 22 January. (t) **Vivekananda University:** 930 shirts, 573 pants, 714 tops, and 115 other ladies garments from 14 January to 18 February.

The following centres distributed various items, shown against their names, to needy people: (a) **Antpur:** 800 kg flour, 400 bars of soap, 400 tubes of toothpaste, and 400 towels in February and March. (b) **Aurangabad:** 4,660 shirts and 535 pants from 4 January to 27 February. (c) **Bankura:** 1,004 shirts and 1,007 pants from 3 October to 12 November. (d) **Baranagar Math:** 268 T-shirts and 138 pants on 8 December. (e) **Baranagar Mission:** 233 shirts, 218 pants, and 456 tops from 22 to 28 March. (f) **Bhubaneswar:** 1,080 shirts and 464 pants from 1 December to 28 February. (g) **Burdwan:** 720 shirts and 1,180

pants from 9 to 16 March. (h) **Chandipur**: 135 shirts and 35 pairs of socks from 9 to 13 March. (i) **Cherrapunjee**: 8,849 shirts, 1,699 T-shirts, 9,683 pants, 4,442 tops, 21 tunics, and 3,488 other garments from 14 November to 28 December. (j) **Contai**: 220 shirts, 230 pants, 250 dhotis, 280 tops, 300 saris, and 250 pairs of socks from 26 December to 8 January. (k) **Cuttack** (sub-centre of **Bhubaneswar**): 450 shirts, 50 T-shirts and 250 pants from 12 to 21 February. (l) **Garbeta**: 3,213 shirts, 3,128 pants, and 2,816 tops from 3 December to 10 February. (m) **Ghatshila**: 1,994 shirts and 983 pants from 11 December to 2 February. (n) **Ichapur**: 1,707 shirts, 1,209 pants, 601 tops, and 700 pairs of socks from 15 January to 28 February. (o) **Itanagar**: 852 shirts, 1,133 pants, 574 tops, and 268 frocks from 25 December to 26 February. (p) **Kamarpukur**: 3,128 shirts, 1,950 pants, and 1,458 tops from 22 December to 26 February. (q) **Katihar**: 410 shirts, 221 pants, and 124 tops from 29 January to 20 March. (r) **Lalgarh**: 5,029 shirts and 2,491 pants from 23 December to 22 February. (s) **Malda**: 1,000 kg rice, 50 kg dal and 35 pairs of shoes in March. (t) **Mayavati**: 63 pants and 1,824 pairs of socks from 4 December to 6 March. (u) **Narottam Nagar**: 600 pants, 604 tops, 100 saris, 151 pairs of socks, and 570 packets of glucose powder from 22 February to 28 March. (v) **Ponnampet**: 7,262 shirts, 624 T-shirts, 6,492 pants, 1,555 tops, 402 leggings, and 609 other garments from 20 January to 7 March. (w) **Rajarhat Bishnupur**: 250 shirts, 340 pants, 41 dhotis, 57 lungis, 103 tops, and 34 saris from 2 to 15 January. (x) **Ranchi Morabadi**: 8,608 shirts and 228 shorts from 19 December to 13 February. (y) **Saradapitha**: 2,536 shirts, 1,064 T-shirts, 3,542 pants, 972 tops, and 250 pairs of socks from 29 September to 6 March. (z) **Shimla**: 246 shirts, 317 T-shirts, 675 pants, 354 tops, and 1,476 pairs of socks from 12 December to 20 January. (aa) **Silchar**: 401 mosquito-nets from 24 January to 23 February.

The following centres distributed various items, as shown against their names, to needy people: (a) **Bankura**: 844 tops and 844 leggings on 27 March. (b) **Gurap**: 400 dhotis, 400 utariyas, and 67 assorted utensils from 29 to 31 March. (c) **Limbdi**: 10,650 kg wheat from 6 to 15 April. (d) **Saradapitha**: 500 dhotis and 50 assorted utensils from 17 to 30 March. (e) **Vijayawada**: 14 shirts and 460 pants on 22 April.

The following centres distributed various items, shown against their names, to needy people: (a) **Bankura**: 834 tops and 721 leggings from 3 to 18 May. (b) **Chandipur**: 20 saris on 29 April. (c) **Gourhati**: 500 shirts, 394 trousers, and 529 tops from 4 to 30 May. (d) **Halasuru**: 4,061 T-shirts and 1,859 pants from 11 April to 24 May. (e) **Kankurgachhi**: 223 saris from 1 to 14 April. (f) **Karimganj**: 100 mosquito-nets, 38 dhotis, and 66 saris on 10 May. (g) **Koyilandy**: 2,040 shirts and 2,663 pants from 18 February to 30 April. (h) **Lalgarh**: 47 plates from 21 February to 24 March. (i) **Shimla**: 382 shirts, 75 pants, and 25 pairs of socks from 1 April to 11 May.

The following centres distributed various items, as shown against their names, to needy people: (a) **Guwahati**: 146 mosquito-nets and 109 saris on 11 June. (b) **Koyilandy**: 250 kg rice, 80 kg dal and stationery items—notebooks, pens, and pencils—among 220 poor tribal students on 24 June. (c) **Narottam Nagar**: 100 cooking stoves, 1,315 textbooks, 1,159 exercise books, 30 pens, 30 pencils, 30 erasers, 30 sharpeners, and 259 kg glucose powder from 1 April to 28 June. (d) **Rajarhat Bishnupur**: 20 saris on 21 and 22 March. (e) **Tiruvalla**: 75 T-shirts, 137 trousers, and 62 tops on 3 and 11 April.

The following centres distributed various items, as shown against their names, to needy people: (April–July): (a) **Burdwan**: 1,194 saris, 1,000 dhotis, 850 utariyas, 121 assorted garments, 83 towels, 140 assorted utensils, and 68

candles from 11 April to 5 July. (b) **Itanagar**: 125 shirts, 202 trousers, 690 tops, and 280 frocks from 25 May to 24 June. (c) **Puri Math**: 119 saris, 50 dhotis, and 50 towels on 25 July. (d) **Bangladesh: Mymensingh**: 12,000 notebooks, 12,000 pens, 3 goats, and 6 ducks from April to July.

(July–August): **India**: (a) **Darjeeling**: 470 shirts, 390 pants, 70 salwar-kameez (ladies garments), 50 children's garments, and 120 bed-sheets on 10 August. (b) **Nagpur**: 1,008 school uniforms, 3,024 notebooks, and 1,008 pens from 10 July to 2 August. **Bangladesh: Chittagong**: 90 kg rice, 225 kg flour, 90 kg dal, 225 kg chira, 90 litres of edible oil, and 90 kg salt on 29 July.

(August–September): **India**: (a) **Antpur**: 1,071 shirts and 1,081 pants from 23 August to 9 September. (b) **Bagda**: 100 saris, 50 dhotis, and 200 children's garments on 23 September. (c) **Dehradun**: 4,572 shirts, 6,812 pants, and 1,570 tops from 5 January to 2 September. (d) **Gadadhar Ashrama, Kolkata**: 100 saris, 32 children's garments, and 18 school uniforms on 20 September. (e) **Gurap**: 211 saris, 52 dhotis, and 28 readymade garments on 22 September. (f) **Kankurgachhi**: 292 saris and 51 dhotis on 8 and 25 August. (g) **Karimganj**: 232 saris and 218 dhotis from 15 to 18 September. (h) **Vrindaban**: 400 kg rice, 400 kg flour, 100 kg dal, 100 kg mustard oil, 200 kg salt, 20 kg tea, 40 kg milk powder, and 100 kg sugar on 20 September.

(September–October): **India**: (a) **Bamunmura**: 199 saris, 70 dhotis, 31 children's garments, 12 frocks, and 150 mosquito-nets from 1 to 26 September. (b) **Baranagar Math**: 100 saris and 50 dhotis on 19 September. (c) **Barasat**: 477 saris, 58 dhotis, and 12 children's garments from 17 to 26 September. (d) **Barisha**: 100 saris and 100 dhotis on 26 September. (e) **Coimbatore Mission**: 1,561 shirts, 1,539 trousers, and 1,261 tops from 15 to 23 October. (f) **Gurap**: 216 saris, 54 dhotis, and 31 garments from 19 September to 6 October. (g) **Patna**: 2,069 shirts and 2,378 trousers from 22

August to 17 September. (h) **Saradapitha**: 3,419 shirts, 3,463 trousers, 700 saris, and 350 children's garments from 30 July to 25 September. (i) **Silchar**: 6,104 shirts, 5,939 trousers, 2,610 saris, 587 dhotis, and 125 frocks from 23 July to 14 October. (j) **Tiruvalla**: 450 kg rice, 45 kg dal, 90 kg sugar, 45 kg edible oil, and 22 kg coffee powder on 2 September.

**Bangladesh: Baliati**: 205 saris, 20 dhotis, and 50 lungis in September. **Chittagong**: 3,000 kg rice, 300 kg dal, 200 saris, 100 children's dresses, and cooked food to 500 families from 15 to 25 September. **Dinajpur**: 1,198 saris in September.

**Rohingya Refugee Relief**: Our centres in **Bangladesh** jointly handed over 5 tons of rice, 1,000 blankets and 500 lungis to the district authorities of Bandarban Hill Tract on 4 October for distribution among the refugees. Further, the centres distributed 10 bags of rice and 170 blankets among 150 refugee families at Kutipalang, Cox's Bazar, on 9 October.

**Drought Relief: Karnataka: Halasuru** centre distributed 30 tons of fodder for cattle at Pavagada taluk in Tumkur district from 15 April to 15 May.

**Drought Rehabilitation: Telangana: Hyderabad** centre installed a reverse osmosis plant at Devalabadra village in Srikakulam district to provide safe drinking water to the villagers. The plant was inaugurated on 9 February.

**Maharashtra: Aurangabad** centre installed 7 water filters, sunk 2 bore-wells, and installed a pump set at different places in Aurangabad district from 3 to 27 February. The centre also distributed 380 water drums, each of 110 litre capacity, among 380 poor families in 7 villages of Aurangabad district during the same period.

**Tamil Nadu**: In response to the severe drought in several regions of Tamil Nadu, **Chennai Students' Home** completed the following projects in May benefiting nearly 2,000 families. (a) Desilting of 3 ponds at Vadapathi, Neivilakku Kulam and Thirukulam villages in Nagapattinam



district. (b) Sinking of 3 cement-ring wells and installed 3 hand-pumps in Mylapore, Kovilpathu and Thensari villages in Nagapattinam district. (c) Sinking of 2 bore-wells and installed 2 hand-pumps at Vadapathi village in Nagapattinam district and Thirukaravasal colony in Thiruvavur district. (d) Installing of a hand-pump near a well in Akkarai Komal village in Thiruvavur district.

**Chennai Students' Home** completed the following projects in June benefitting nearly 4,000 families: (a) Desilting of 3 ponds at Pariyari Kulam village in Nagapattinam district and Maavoor Thachan Kulam and Ottakudi Peria Kulam villages in Thiruvavur district. (b) Desilting of 3 wells at Jeeva Nagar, Kooranthankudi Mela Theru and Kanchanagaram Kamma Kinaru villages in Nagapattinam district. (c) Sinking of 4 cement-ring wells and installation of 4 hand pumps in Koothan Pathu, Iluppai Thoppu, Keela Veli and Peria Karukudi villages in Nagapattinam district. (d) Sinking of 20 bore-wells and installation of 20 hand pumps in 9 villages of Nagapattinam district and 11 villages of Thiruvavur district. (e) Sinking of a deep bore-well and installation of a submersible pump at Kodiyalathur panchayat in Nagapattinam district. (f) Cleaning of a deep bore-well and installation of a pump at Therku Alathur village in Nagapattinam district.

The centre completed the following projects in July benefitting nearly 2,200 families: (a) Desilting of 2 ponds, one at Koodakudi Sambankulam in Nagapattinam district and another at Ammayappan Thenkal Kulam village in Thiruvavur district. (b) Sinking of 15 bore-wells and installation of 15 hand pumps in 11 villages of Nagapattinam district and 4 villages of Thiruvavur district. (c) Sinking of a deep bore-well and installation of a submersible pump at Maavoor Atrangarai village in Thiruvavur district. (d) Fixing of a pipeline and installation of a hand pump at Kalasampadi Kottagam village in Nagapattinam district.

**West Bengal: Saradapitha** centre installed two arsenic-and-iron removal plants at Manikchak village in Malda district and Sandelerbil village in North 24-Parganas district. The plants were commissioned on 1 and 23 June respectively.

**Distress Rehabilitation: Bamunmura** centre built a house for a needy family staying near the Ashrama. The house was handed over to the family on 16 September.

**Economic Rehabilitation: West Bengal:** The following centres distributed the items stated against their names among poor and needy people: (a) **Antpur:** 46 sewing machines, 15 rickshaw vans, and 175 sets of dhadda—weaving accessories—in February and March. (b) **Malda:** 7 sewing machines and a tricycle in March.

**Tamil Nadu: Nattarampalli** centre distributed 44 sewing machines among poor and needy people on 2 April.

**Karnataka: Ponnampet** centre distributed 14 sewing machines among poor and needy people on 20 May.

**Odisha: Puri Mission** centre distributed 14 cycle-carts and 3 cycle-rickshaws among poor and needy people on 3 July.

**Fire Relief: Assam:** (i) In the aftermath of a devastating fire that broke out at Gopinathnagar Pukurpar area in Guwahati, **Guwahati** centre distributed 27 blankets, 13 mosquito-nets, 20 saris, 20 dhotis, and 13 utensil sets—each set containing a pot, a pan, 2 plates, and a tumbler—among 13 affected families on 12 March. (ii) On 2 March, **Silchar** centre distributed 65 saris, 30 dhotis, 40 mosquito-nets, 65 scarfs, 8 kg milk powder, 11 litres of milk, 14 kg biscuits, 100 notebooks, 30 pens, 30 pencils, 30 sharpeners, and 30 erasers among 40 families whose houses had been destroyed in an accidental fire at Chengkuri Road in Silchar town.


**Arunachal Pradesh:** In response to an accidental fire in Ori village, **Aalo** centre distributed

22 blankets, 2 sets of utensils—each set containing a karahi, a handi [cooking pot], a kettle, a bucket, a plate, a bowl, a ladle, a jug, a gamla [utensil for storing cooked food], and a mug—and stationery items among 2 affected families in April.

Following a fire accident at Kerang village in West Siang district, **Aalo** centre distributed 166 blankets and 26 utensil sets—each set containing 2 cooking pots, a kettle, a bucket, 4 plates, 4 bowls, a ladle, a jug, a tumbler, and a mug—among 26 affected families and stationery items—notebooks, pens, pencils—among 61 students on 17 May.

Subsequent to a fire accident at Gumin Yijo village in West Siang district, **Aalo** centre distributed 37 blankets and 8 sets of utensils—each set containing 4 plates, 4 bowls, a karahi, a pot, a kettle, a bucket, a ladle, a jug, a tumbler, and a mug—among 8 affected families, and stationery items—notebooks, pens, pencils—among 14 needy students on 11 June.

In the wake of an accidental fire at Tadin village in West Siang district, **Aalo** centre distributed 234 blankets and 37 sets of utensils—each set containing 4 plates, 4 bowls, 2 cooking pots, a kettle, a bucket, a ladle, a jug, a tumbler, and a mug—among 37 families, and stationery items—notebooks, pens, pencils—among 19 students on 13 August.

**Bangladesh:** On 23 May, **Dhaka** centre provided a milch cow and a calf to a family in Thakurgaon whose house had been destroyed by an accidental fire. 

Eye Camps			
Centre	Patients	Spectacles	Surgeries
Asansol	160	52	31
Bamunmura	85	-	8
Bankura	4,116	456	785
Bardhaman	300	10	10
Chengalpattu and Chennai Math	727	235	100
Delhi	916	66	144
Ghatshila	649	338	271
Halasuru	763	268	268
Jamshedpur	991	-	585
Kamarpukur	3,978	835	788
Kanpur	450	31	-
Khetri	991	46	248
Lucknow	25,938	-	3,357
Madurai	2,107	39	423
Mayavati	1,084	-	332
Medinipur	684	-	78
Nagpur	123	51	26
Porbandar	703	-	245
Rajamahendravaram	2,156	439	231
Rajkot	1,519	-	598
Ranchi Morabadi	10,680	326	46
Salem	2,018	413	518
Saradapitha	2,510	-	358
Sargachhi	7,822	139	520
Seva Pratishthan	821	86	86
Silchar	2,260	119	436
Vadodara	486	-	52
Varanasi Home of Service	639	613	613
<b>Total</b>	<b>75,676</b>	<b>4,562</b>	<b>11,157</b>

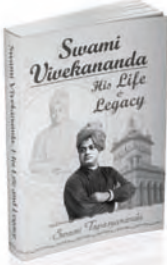
**Correction** · December 2017, pp. 805–13: Read Sarade-shananda instead of Gopeshananda.

December 2017, p. 818: Read Subhasis Chattopadhyay, Psychoanalyst, Assistant Professor of English, Narasinha Dutt College, Howrah, instead of Subhasis Chattopadhyay, Psychoanalyst, Assistant Professor of English, Ramananda College, Bishnupur.

### Free Child Care and Eye Camps

Child Eye Care Programmes			
Centre	Children	Spectacles	Surgeries
Ranchi Morabadi	5,323	0	29
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,323</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>29</b>

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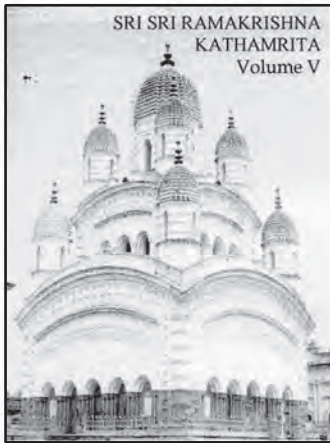


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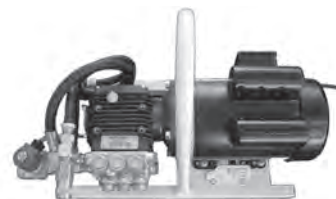
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— compiled & edited by Sankari Prasad Basu



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## Religious Behaviour & Spiritual Experience

—Asit Chandra Chakraborty  
in collaboration with  
Swami Priyavratanaanda



The religious have always intrigued the lay. Spiritual life and experience eludes ordinary understanding or so it seems. Senses fail to fathom spiritual truths. Science seems to be at loggerheads with spirituality. Is there any meeting ground? Can spiritual truths be investigated by a scientific mind using scientific techniques? Why do people take to spiritual life? Is there any scientific truth behind supra-normal experiences? These and other questions have been explored in this book.

Pages: 338 | Price: ₹ 100 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 35

## Fear Not, Be Strong

—Swami Tathagatananda

Strength and fearlessness are the two prime virtues, among the others, which are the markers of health of a human being (both man and woman) and society. Every crime, antisocial and inhuman act is the outcome of lack of true strength and fearlessness. But what do we mean by strength, and what does fearlessness connote? Swami Tathagatananda has presented Vivekananda's views on this matter, which, we are sure, will shed new light on our understanding of these eternal virtues.

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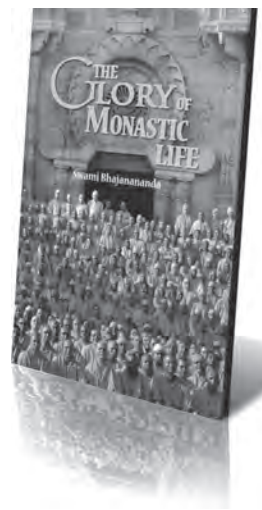


## The Glory of Monastic Life

—Swami Bhajananda

The present booklet keeps before the readers the glory of the monastic life. It discusses the traditional modes of monasticism and compares them with the modern monastic way of life as seen in the Ramakrishna Order. With the changing times, monasticism too has to grow and assume new forms to adapt to the new situations. Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda brought about this change in the outward form of Indian monasticism without deviating from the eternal principles. This book gives an overview of monasticism in general, and the Ramakrishna monasticism in particular.

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Ramakrishna Math, Mekhliganj, is situated in a rural setting adjoining India's border with Bangladesh. It was started in 1957 by Swami Rudreshwarananda Maharaj, an initiated disciple of Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, the sixth President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. In 1999, a temple was constructed and dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna Deva, and in 2006, it was made into a sub-centre of the Cooch Behar centre. Recently the Ashrama was made into a full-fledged branch centre of the Ramakrishna Math in October 2015.

We plan to enlarge our activities in the field of education, child health, personality development, and skill training for young girls and boys. But first we are in urgent need of funds to repair and renovate of the old buildings. Owing to their poverty, the local people are unable to contribute financially for these noble causes.

We therefore appeal to the generous citizens, philanthropic organisations and business houses, to contribute liberally for the welfare of the poor and the under-privileged sections of the society. Donations to the Ramakrishna Math (Mekhliganj) are exempt from Income Tax under section 80G of Income Tax Act 1961. Cheques/Demand Drafts/M.O. may kindly be drawn in favour of Ramakrishna Math (Mekhliganj) and send to the address mentioned below.

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## The Light of the Modern World

Swami Bhajanananda



Pages 268 | Price ₹ 100  
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According to Swami Vivekananda, 'With the birth of Sri Ramakrishna the Golden Age has begun.' But today, for the generality of people, such an assertion may appear preposterous, with no sign of such a beginning visible anywhere. Who was Sri Ramakrishna? What was the purpose of his advent? Did he bring about a silent revolution, unseen on the surface?

This book skilfully deals with these issues, taking for its subject the Avatarahood of Sri Ramakrishna and its universal significance. In the course of his discussion the author presents the different facets of an Avatara and the universal relevance of his message. Many other spiritual topics too are dealt with, all of which go into the making of this impressive and inspiring work.

## Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita (Sanskrit) Complete Set (4 volumes)

Original Bengali by Sri Mahendranath Gupta

Translated by Swami Tattwavidananda and Dr. Ayan Bhattacharya



Pages 1914 | Price ₹ 165  
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## ***The Monk without Frontiers* —A Compilation**

We are happy to notify the readers about the new “ENHANCED EDITION” of *The Monk without Frontiers*—Reminiscences of Swami Ranganathananda. In this edition two more articles on the Swami have been included. The size (layout) of the book has been changed to a larger one, and also the typeset is new, enhancing the overall look and readability of the book. The book now has a new cover.

This book is a compilation of articles on Swami Ranganathananda written by the monks of the Ramakrishna Order, nuns of the Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, and devotees and admirers of the Swami. There are 136 pieces of writing presenting before us his multi-faceted personality in an inspiring as well as interesting manner.



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Pages 198 | Price ₹ 60  
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The Bhagavata Purana has for centuries been one of the favourite religious texts of India, and this is mostly because of its charming and attractive stories, like the story of Prahlada, of Dhruva, of King Bharata, and many more. What the Bhagavatam is most known for, however, are the stories of Krishna's life. Almost all his stories are included in this volume—his childhood in Vrindavan, his youth in Mathura, and his later years in Dwaraka.

This volume is especially helpful for readers who do not yet know the stories and would like to learn them. But it is also helpful for readers who know the stories already—or at least some of them—as this volume will refresh their memories and also help them learn many new stories.

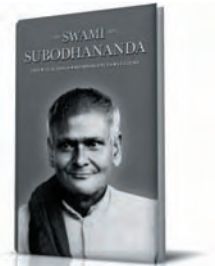
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By Dr Satish Kapoor

This work attempts to explain the quintessential of Hinduism within the orbit of time and beyond it, involving an explication of the eternal values and principles which sustain existence. It mainly explores the dynamics of Hinduism in a religio-historical framework through the second millennium of the common era. It has four parts: 1) The Faith Eternal; 2) Hinduism During the Second Millennium; 3) Images and Impact; and 4) Perceptions and Perspectives. This is a scholarly work with copious notes and references, a rich glossary, and over 90 photographs in black and white.

## ***Vivekananda in America*** ***Footprints in New England—A Documentary***



Duration 85 mins | Price ₹ 60 | Packing & Postage: ₹ 60

While in America Swami Vivekananda returned to New England time and again and visited the states of Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, and Connecticut. This movie transports viewers to those places—enlivened with his brilliance and universal message, which attracted and inspired many, including renowned scholars, scientists and sincere seekers of Truth and continued to influence the spiritual thought-current, even to this day.



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Be you holy and, above all, sincere; and do not for a moment give up your trust in the Lord, and you will see the light. Whatever is truth will remain for ever; whatever is not, none can preserve.... Whatever others think or do, lower not your standard of purity, morality, and love of God... No one who loves God need fear any jugglery. Holiness is the highest, and divinest power in earth and in heaven. "Truth alone triumphs, not untruth. Through truth alone is opened the way to God." ... Do not care for a moment who joins hands with you or not, be sure that you touch the hand of the Lord.

— Swami Vivekananda

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Swami Nirvanananda, Vice-President (1966-1984)  
Ramakrishna Math And Ramakrishna Mission

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*When you can love your friend  
and foe with the same intensity,  
you will surely realise God.*

With sastanga pranams from his Anonymous Disciple

## RENUNCIATION AND SERVICE

### Swami Vireswarananda

(Tenth President, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission)

Whenever a young man took to the life of renunciation, the Holy Mother used to be highly pleased. Notwithstanding many defects that remain associated with our work, you praise the activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. But who are doing these works? These activities cannot go on without the Sanyasins and Brahmacharins. You request us to establish a monastery here, open a school there; but where are the men required – monks and Brahmacharins – to do all these works? That is why your sons or daughters from be-desire to renounce the world. such inclinations in them, please the boys to renounce the world, to do. If in their childhood you ideal, it will stay with them. In dalasa who used to recite the es-(knowledge of Brahman) to her art the stainless One,” when put-nurtured in this way, as soon took the vows of renunciation her children became Sanyasins. will take shape according to the childhood. If you like the activi-if you think that through these India and the world, in that case dren in a manner that will be of service to such activities of the Order. And you have to give encouragement to those children who want to become monks and nuns.



I appeal to you not to prevent coming monks and nuns if they On the other hand, if you notice encourage them. Please inspire exactly as the Holy Mother used make them understand this our ancient lore, we read of Ma-sential teachings of Brahmavidya children and sing to them “Thou ting them to sleep. Having been as they grew somewhat, they and left the world. Thus three of The future of your children also training you give them in their ties of the Ramakrishna Mission, activities good will be done to you should train up your chil-

Please think of one more thing. Leave alone the work of the Order, even to do work in other fields, there is need for renunciation. Many young men of our country join the armed forces these days. Many among their mothers do not like this. It seems to me that such an attitude is the result of intense self-ishness. The mothers think that their sons and daughters should stay close to them, employed in the teaching or medical professions; that there is no need for them to go to war and face the guns. If that is the attitude, how will the independence of India be preserved? The independence of India must be preserved, and, to be sure, the sons and daughters of India will have to do that. How can things go on, if we do not have the spirit of self- sacrifice for the sake of the country, the spirit of the Kshatriya (the warrior caste), and evince undivided loyalty to the whole country.

Just listen to what a heroic Western mother did during the last war. She had an only son who had to go to the battlefield. “Go and fight for the country”, said the mother joyfully. “Yes, I shall go”, said the son, “but please write me one letter every week”. The mother consented to do this. The son went to the war and the mother continued to write him regularly for a long time. Then she fell ill. She learnt that her illness was incurable and that she would live no more. She thought that if her son did not get her letter, then he might leave the fighting forces and return home, which she did not at all want to happen. So, before dying, she wrote a number of letters with dates of one week’s gap and told a lady-friend, “Look here, I am leaving these letters with you. After I die, you will post one letter every week according to the dates.” The content of the letters was: “I am well. Do not at all feel concerned for me. You are fighting for the country. Fight on without worry.” After making the arrangements for posting the letters in this way, the mother died. The letters continued to reach the son regularly and he thought that his mother was doing well. Afterwards, when he returned home, he heard everything. Unless a mother is like this, how can the sons and daughters be of such heroic character?

[“Spiritual Ideal for the Present Age”, Madras Math, First Edition 1983, pages 35-37]

Bani, Bhaskar, Debasree, Devajit & Ruchira Roy  
(Chittaranjan Park, New Delhi)

Unselfishness is more paying, only  
people have not the patience to  
practise it.

—*Swami Vivekananda*—



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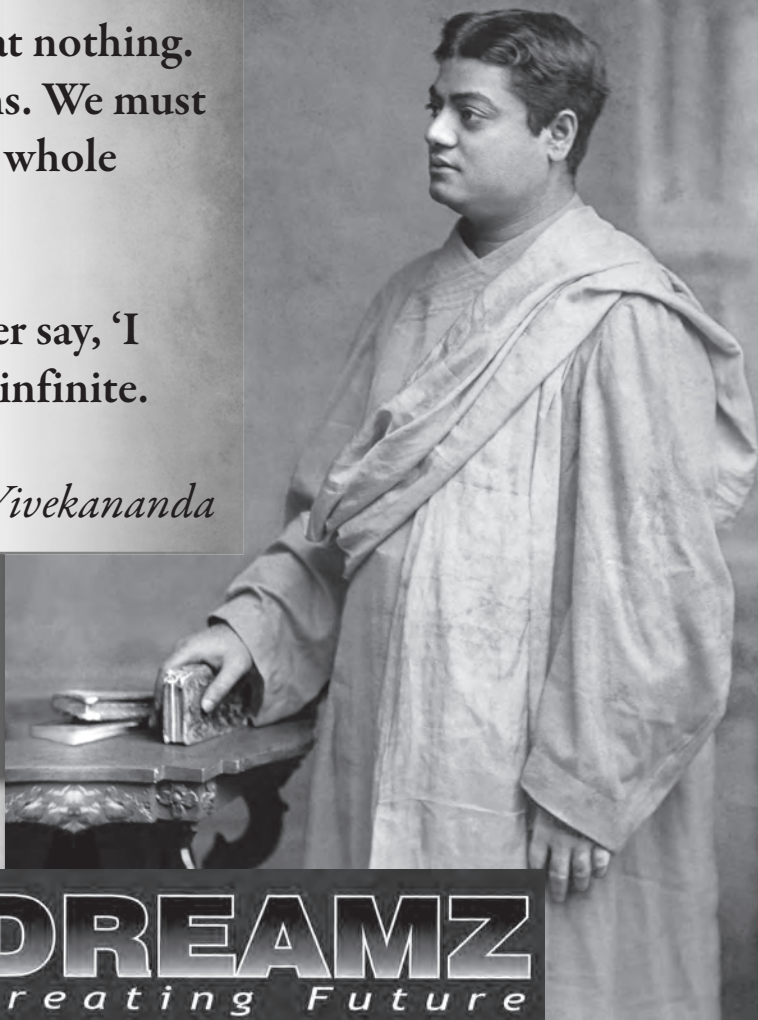
Each soul is potentially divine.  
The goal is to manifest this  
Divinity within.

Strength is life, weakness is  
death.

Fear nothing, stop at nothing.  
You will be like lions. We must  
rouse India and the whole  
world.

Never say, 'No', never say, 'I  
cannot', for you are infinite.

—*Swami Vivekananda*



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Meanwhile in this ancient land of pilgrimage this ashrama carved out in Shi Shri Thakur's name has found a place in the hearts of many devotees. Lovers of pilgrimages, the Himalayan people, have accepted this new place of worship (established in 2014) dedicated to Thakur Maa Swamiji with love, respect and devotion.

Therefore, taking the future into consideration the need is to earmark the sliding zones and build strong retaining walls.

For this purpose, the estimated cost will be approximately 30 lakh rupees. We appeal to all devotees to please donate generously towards this venture. May Thakur Maa Swamiji shower their choicest blessings on each one of you.

This is my heartfelt prayer.

Yours in the lord

**Swami Sarvatmananda**  
Secretary

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The best guide in life is strength.  
In religion, as in all other matters,  
discard everything that weakens  
you, have nothing to do with it.

—Swami Vivekananda

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**Managing Editor:** Swami Muktidananda. **Editor:** Swami Narasimhananda. **Printed by:** Swami Vibhatmananda at Gipidi Box Co., 3B Chatu Babu Lane, Kolkata 700 014 and published by him for Advaita Ashrama (Mayavati) from Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014, on 1 January 2018.